



# Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter  
Summer 2020

## The Atlantic Coast Pipeline is CANCELLED!

by Jessica Sims and Gustavo Angeles

On Sunday, July 5, Dominion Energy and Duke announced that they have cancelled the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the 600 mile, \$8B fracked-gas pipeline that would have crossed West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina and potentially extended into South Carolina. The ruinous project's parent companies cited ongoing litigation related to the recent overturning of the Nationwide Permit 12, missing Federal permits, the tree-felling schedule, the additional investment needed and an "unacceptable layer of uncertainty." Dominion also announced that it is selling its natural gas transmission and storage business to Berkshire Hathaway Energy for almost \$10 billion.

From our friends at Friends of Buckingham, the incredible community group in Union Hill who have fought the ACP's Buckingham Compressor Station:

"We in Friends of Buckingham are all so overjoyed with this incredible news. This was a hard won victory and worth every moment of showing up for hearings, writing letters, marching, legal battles, meeting after meeting and consistently and persistently never giving up. Sierra Club was with us every step along the way. Our efforts came together in so many ways. We think that Dominion and Duke made the best decision possible for the people, the climate and the environment."

Thank you to all of the community members, activists, partners and organizations from West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina that worked together to fight this ruinous project. This outcome is the result of people across three states working together.

A special thank you to Kirk Bowers, the indomitable advocate for communities along the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipeline's routes; Glen Besa, for making fighting ACP a Chapter priority; the team, at both the Chapter and National Level, current and former staff working on this project—Caroline Hansley, Elly Benson, Jessica Sims, Nathan Matthews, Joan Walker, Doug Jackson, Mahyar Sorour, Kate Addleson, Tim Cywinski, Lynn Godfrey, Billy Davies, Zach Jarjoura, Beth Roach,



Community members and partners at the May 17, 2019 March to End Environmental Racism Now: March with Union Hill event at Dominion headquarters in Charlottesville (photo courtesy of Tim Cywinski).

Mary-Stuart Torbeck and Ann Creasy; the Sierra Club groups across Virginia fighting the ACP; and many more!

Visit <https://vasierra.club/pipelines> for more information, news articles and how to give help defeat the Mountain Valley Pipeline!

Fossil fuel infrastructure in Virginia: Harmful to communities and the environment

Virginia is home to a massive number of existing fossil fuel infrastructure sites which criss-cross the state, and often multiple types of fossil fuel infrastructure are located in the same community. What we must recognize, and stop, is the harms these projects bring; how the locations are determined; and that communities of color, Indigenous communities and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by these projects. From air and water impacts, to cumulative social and health costs, demonstrated by The American Journal of Public Health's findings that Black Americans are exposed to 1.54 times more harmful air pollution than white Americans, Virginia's infrastructure causes harm and moves us further from the necessary steps to mitigate the climate crisis. Virginia utility monopoly Dominion Resources has previously received a "F" rating for their Corporate Environmental Justice performance score in the

NAACP report "Coal Blooded: Putting Profits Before People." Further compounding the calculated and deliberate locations for existing and proposed projects are the restrictive barriers to learning about and speaking against projects that would actively harm one's own community. From lack of adequate public notification to inaccessible regulatory hearings the opportunities for the public to weigh in are dangerously lacking. Fossil fuel expansion runs counter to the equitable treatment of Virginians, and the environmental injustice and racism occurring in Virginia are intrinsically linked with systemic racial injustice and violence against communities of color.

### Chickahominy Gas Plant

In our Winter 2019 issue, we drew attention to the Department of Environmental Quality's decision to host an open comment period for the Chickahominy Gas Plant over the holidays, which limited public participation. Subsequently, DEQ decided to extend the comment period.

A few weeks ago, DEQ sent a notice calling for a State Water Control Board meeting on June 29, two days before newly approved legislation was to become law. In particular, the Environmental Justice Act (SB 406), defines terms like Environmental Justice, Fair Treatment, Fenceline Community,

Low-income Community, Community of Color and Meaningful Involvement. These terms were not defined before in the Virginia Code, and now government bodies like DEQ and Citizen Boards must consider and promote environmental justice with a focus on EJ communities.

Holding an online meeting at a time when most people are working and when the directly impacted community (a Fenceline Community) does not have reliable internet service or cell phone service does not qualify as meaningful involvement. The Virginia Attorney General's office, along with 11 attorney general state offices, sent a request in May to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to "suspend approval of all new fossil fuel infrastructure related projects until the pandemic has passed and the public has the ability to engage fully." But DEQ proceeded with holding meetings in a business-as-usual way. This is not news; earlier last year, DEQ held an Air Pollution Control Board meeting for the air permit for the Chickahominy Gas Power Plant in a location on the opposite side of Charles City County. For directly impacted community members to have been able to participate, they would have had to drive an hour each way, and all told, they would have had to ask for a day off from work.

The water withdrawal was originally proposed as a "special exception" but quietly reclassified shortly before the June 28 State Water Control Board meeting. It allows Balico, LLC to withdraw 30 million gallons of water annually from the Potomac Aquifer, a water source DEQ categorized as "overallocated." Shamefully, the State Water Control Board moved forward with making a permitting decision and approved the permit on a 6-0 vote, potentially jeopardizing the drinking water supply of Charles City County. Despite outcry from local residents where the plant would be located and from 35 state and regional environmental and justice organizations, the DEQ prioritized the timeline of the merchant

See Fossil fuels on page 7.

## Notes from the chair: Walking the walk

by Daryl Downing



### From the chair

In a historic time where systemic racism is in the news daily, it's worth taking a look at ourselves. I value what the Sierra Club does, which is why I volunteer dozens of hours each week to further its goals. But we're very white and getting older every day. Since I'm white and middle-aged, I don't see this as problematic, but realize it's important that people who don't fit into this demographic feel just as welcome in our organization. The Chapter and many groups will be holding elections later this year—please encourage those in your network and/or community who are not represented in our leadership cadre to throw their hats in the ring.

As we prioritize environmental justice, we are eager to work with more communities of color on the issues that matter most to them. We are also eager to increase and/or secure broader protections such as a fracking ban across all of Virginia and policies that will impede any further development of fossil fuels, especially gas.

Likewise, we can educate ourselves about systemic racism and white priv-

ilege and educate others about the intersections between environmentalism and historic discrimination.

I'm proud that the Chapter is fully engaged to stop the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the proposed compressor station in Union Hill (note: we won this thanks to our willingness to support frontline communities and ensure their voices were heard), fracked gas plants in Charles City County and a landfill in Cumberland County. All of these projects have an environmental justice component that informs our engagement decisions. Merriam-Webster defines allyship as "the state or condition of being an ally: supportive association with another person or group; specifically: such association with the members of a marginalized or mistreated group to which one does not belong."

Our Club is touted as the largest grassroots environmental organization in the nation. Rolling into a community and taking charge is very likely to result in bad outcomes. However, working in allyship with people or groups based in a community is a recipe for success. We need to increase our allyship with groups in environmental justice communities to continue to show how important their wellbeing is to us as we endeavor to improve the wellbeing of all Virginians.

So, let's increase the diversity of our leaders and members so we better represent the people and communities we serve. And let's double down on the campaigns we take on that will benefit EJ communities—a WIN-WIN for everyone (except big polluters!).

*Daryl Downing is the chair of the Virginia Chapter.*

### The Cold Within

Six humans trapped in happenstance  
In dark and bitter cold,  
Each one possessed a stick of wood,  
Or so the story's told.  
Their dying fire in need of logs,  
The first woman held hers back,  
For of the faces around the fire,  
She noticed one was black.  
The next man looking across the way  
Saw not one of his church,  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.  
The third one sat in tattered clothes.  
He gave his coat a hitch,  
Why should his log be put to use,  
To warm the idle rich?  
The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store,  
And how to keep what he had earned,  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.  
The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from sight,  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.  
The last man of this forlorn group  
Did naught except for gain,  
Giving only to those who gave,  
Was how he played the game.  
The logs held tight in death's still hands,  
Was proof of human sin,  
They didn't die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.

- by James Patrick Kinney -

## Virginia Sierran

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100 West Franklin St., Mezzanine, Richmond, Virginia 23220  
<https://sierraclub.org/virginia>

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

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

**Virginia Sierran Editor:** Sevim Kalyoncu, [editorvirginiasieran@gmail.com](mailto:editorvirginiasieran@gmail.com)

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

Please contact [member.care@sierraclub.org](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.

## Responding to the challenges of our time

by Kate Addleson



The past few months have been transformational for our country and organization in ways we never could have anticipated. As the pandemic continues to spread, it has increasingly revealed systemic inequities that are more easily overlooked in times of relative comfort and ease. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color is connected to inequities in our health system as well as higher rates of preexisting conditions irrefutably caused by higher levels of exposure to pollution and other

environmental hazards. One particularly important example is that people of color are more likely than Whites to be exposed to air pollution.

It can be both devastating and inspiring to confront the inequities and discrimination that permeate our culture and disproportionately harm people of color. Yet, it is imperative for us to grapple with the challenges of systemic racism and white privilege if we are going to be effective in achieving lasting change. By committing to the work of being an anti-racist environmental organization, we are putting a “welcome” sign on our door to people from all walks of life.

Here is a good definition of anti-racism: “Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably” (NAC International Perspectives: Women and Global Solidarity).

Please visit <https://vasierra.club/> equity to find anti-racism resources and our commitment to equity and justice, and please contact our Equity Chair, Carolyn Lyle, at [lylecnl@gmail.com](mailto:lylecnl@gmail.com).

com if you are interested in joining racial justice initiatives and discussions,

As we work to chart the course ahead through this challenging landscape, we will continue to focus on our strategic goals and commitment on advancing climate solutions. Our chapter and locally-led regional groups across the state are moving activities and resources to more accessible digital and virtual formats, in order to provide more remote options for social connectivity. In addition, the Black Lives Matter movement is providing numerous opportunities for action and solidarity. So, while some initiatives have hit pause, others are being augmented or are expanding.

One area of expansion is at the intersection of racial justice and clean transportation solutions. Although we will not be pursuing a statewide “Summer of Action” due to COVID restrictions, this and other campaigns that disproportionately affect communities of color will continue to move forward. As you may know, in recent years Virginia’s transportation sector has eclipsed our electric sector to become the most egregious of greenhouse gas emitters. And for decades

our transportation system has been a major source of pollution and a barrier to equity for communities of color and low-income communities as a result of discriminatory planning practices.

Please contact Cheri Conca at [cheri.conca@sierraclub.org](mailto:cheri.conca@sierraclub.org) to get involved in our Clean Transportation For All work, and please contact Kelly Adams at [kelly.adams@sierraclub.org](mailto:kelly.adams@sierraclub.org) for access to chapter guidance on Organizing Together While Staying Apart.

For more information on these issues, please check out the following websites: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/race-and-climate-change>, <https://www.fiveprinciples.org/>, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/blms-whatmatters2020-goals-and-focus/>, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

*Kate Addleson is the director of the Virginia Chapter.*

## Our virtual voice: Using action alerts to make ourselves be heard

by Tim Cywinski

“Nothing can stand in the way of the power of millions of voices calling for change.” This quote by then-Sen. Barack Obama captures the spirit that partly inspires me to work in politics and advocacy.

We are currently living through a moment that reminds all of us to wield the power of our voices for the good of all people. Here in Richmond, you don’t have to go far to hear a chorus of activists chanting “No Justice, No Peace” and “I can’t breathe.” Every day, there is a march, protest or vigil where the names of those murdered serve as a rally cry for change. Every day, people from all over the city are using their voices to remind the world that our current institutions did not treat the lives of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Marcus David Peters and countless other black and brown individuals as though they mattered.

Voices for change don’t stay siloed in our physical world. They spill into our digital reality through social media posts, online petitions, virtual rallies, email campaigns and so much more.

Especially in this moment of social isolation, we cannot afford to overlook any opportunity to voice calls to action. As I wrote in my last article, the Sierra Club is equipped with a suite of digital tools designed to empower our staff and groups. This article will focus on what we refer to as “action alerts.”

Action alerts were created to bridge the gap between people and a target that is in a position of power. Targets are usually public officials—elected representatives, heads of state agencies, policy analysts, etc.—but sometimes they can be an entire group such as members of the State Air Pollution Control Board. Almost all of our action alerts will enable citizens to automatically send messages to the targets. We always prepare a prewritten message that captures our specific ask, but a personal message option can be added as well. This approach has been proven to almost always be more effective than collecting traditional petitions.

There are many success stories that are directly related to action

alerts. By now, you are probably familiar with our efforts towards stopping the approval of the Chickahominy gas plant. If built, this unnecessary project will be the fifth largest plant of its kind in the country. What’s more, the plant will be located in Charles City County, an environmental justice community that already shoulders intense levels of pollution from an existing plant and a large landfill.

The original period to submit comments in opposition to the plant was only 30 days, and it occurred during the peak holiday season, an unacceptable timeline. We sent out an action alert that enabled individuals to send messages asking the Department of Environmental Quality to move and extend the deadline so people had more time to understand the impact of this wreckless project. Within one day of the alert, more than 500 people sent messages of disapproval to DEQ, which subsequently extended the period to 60 days.

Action alerts are not an exclusive tool for staff. We encourage all of our

volunteer leaders and groups working on a local initiative to utilize this digital advocacy method. Some groups have already taken advantage of action alerts, but we are holding a series of virtual trainings for those who have yet to learn how or who want a refresher course. These training are free to attend. They will be held on July 14 at 6 p.m., July 17 at 11 a.m., July 21 at 6 p.m. and July 24 at 11 a.m. Go to <https://vasierra.club/digital> to sign up.

At its core, action alerts are another way of amplifying our collective voice. These last few months showcase how effective speaking up and out can be. I know that a clean and equitable future is within reach, but we must use our voices to get there.

*Tim Cywinski is the communications coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.*

## Great Falls Group update by Norbert Pink

The Great Falls Group has remained active in multiple arenas over the past few months. Please check out our past activities at <https://tinyurl.com/y8bwk6e5> for more information about our work, including links to the articles referenced in **bold** below. All GFG-hosted events (virtual and in-person) are free and open to the public.

### GFG reorganization

GFG has realized that not all members are included in its activities due to a number of factors, so we are looking at reorganizing and would like members' involvement. See <https://bit.ly/2YtsojH> for an article from our Cascade newsletter that explains our process for reorganizing, including Zoom discussions.

### GFG Cascade

If you live in Fauquier, Loudoun or the western part of Fairfax or Prince William and you have not been receiving the GFG Cascade monthly digital newsletter (see <https://contacc/3dLtZ8F> for the recent newsletter), please email [norbertsierra@aol.com](mailto:norbertsierra@aol.com) to be added to the distribution list.

### Volunteer night

Volunteer Night for the Environment, March 11, provided details and updates on the following issues and action opportunities:

- Data center campaign ideas, impact and recent news and updates
- Clean transportation solutions in Northern Virginia
- Fighting the pipeline extensions proposed in Virginia, the Transco Southeastern Pipeline Extensions and the Manassas Loop

### Climate and energy

Longtime, active GFG member Debra Jacobson, J.D., received a Sustainability Champions award from Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions at a virtual awards program on June 4. Debra has been an inspiration to GFG and the Northern Virginia environmental community because of her outstanding expertise and knowledge of clean energy. She has been a strong and steady voice in guiding local county employees and Virginia legislators in developing sound clean energy programs for the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Thanks to FACS for recognizing Debra's excellent clean energy advocacy. Please check out Debra's **speech**



*Debra Jacobson, an active GFG member, received a Sustainability Champions award from Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions.*

and a video of the **awards ceremony** through the URL mentioned above.

Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Chair Jeff McKay and Fairfax County Public Schools Chair Karen Corbett Sanders shared their vision for climate progress by 2030 during this awards ceremony as well.

### Data centers

A new BBC 24-minute version of "Dirty Streaming: The Internet's Big Secret" provides insight into the polluting aspects of data centers, including those located in Northern Virginia. Here are some of its highlights:

(11:45) Loudoun County has over 70% of the world's internet traffic going through its data centers with 75% of that traffic due to video demands. Data Centers started in Loudoun County because AOL was started there.

(13:30) Alex Rough of GFG is interviewed numerous times in the video.

(16:30) The impact of Dominion's dirty energy use is discussed.

(20:15) The film recommends ways you can reduce your data center demands. It's well worth your time to view.

Natalie Pien presented a slide show on Data Center Alley—Powered by Dirty Energy at the March 11 GFG volunteer night.

### Pipelines

GFG continues its activism with the Transco Southeast and Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project fracked-gas pipelines.

We held a community meeting on

the pipelines in Warrenton on March 4. GFG asked Piedmont Environmental Council to host this third community session after GFG organized two others in Manassas. Updates on fighting the proposed pipeline extensions were provided at the March 11 volunteer night.

Susan Bonney spoke representing Northern Virginia at a community webinar on the Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project on April 13. She also testified by phone at the State Corporation Commission hearing on the project on May 12 and will again for the June 8 hearing. Her **letter to the editor**, "Public hearing on unneeded gas pipeline inaccessible," was published on May 26 in the Prince William Times.

GFG members successfully lobbied several local delegates to sign onto a May 11 **letter** calling on Gov. Ralph Northam to halt the project. Among the signers were three Prince William area delegates—Dels. Elizabeth Guzman, Lee Carter, and Danica Roem—as well as five others from Fairfax County—Dels. Kaye Kory, Ibraheem Samirah, Patrick Hope, Dan Helmer, and Mark Keam.

Natalie Pien's **letter to the editor**, suggested by Jessica Sims, was published on May 19 in LoudounNow. It includes updates and calls to action against the unneeded Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines. Natalie also participated in Supervisor Sylvia Glass's virtual meeting to discuss environmental concerns as well as Loudoun's Data Center Alley.

GFG sponsored Virginia Pipeline Resisters' Virtual Comment Writing Party for the Header Improvement Project on May 28.

### Fairfax County Community-wide Energy and Climate Action Plan

It is the intention of Fairfax County staff to continue working to keep the CECAP process moving along as closely as possible to the original timeline while being responsive to the ever-changing restrictions and guidance for public safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. FC has responded with 43 pages of answers to a previous feedback questionnaire that was sent to the CECAP Task Force and Focus Groups. A summary document was also provided at the above link and it summarized questions 2 through 8. Members advocated for more aggressive goal setting and concern about meeting Green

House Gas emission goals with 5 year interim year goals.

Ann Bennett of GFG provided **testimony** before the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors on the FY 2021 budget. She addressed staffing for the county energy and climate office and transportation.

### Land use

We are working to change the Fairfax County "uncodified emergency ordinance" to make it more favorable to public input. We sent a **letter** to the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission. We also reached out to state officials but received no response. We are working to build a new grassroots land use organization to advocate for more transparency and public input into development.

Natalie Pien has been active with the updating of the Loudoun County Zoning Ordinance for compliance with the county's new comprehensive plan and working with the Loudoun County planning staff on this issue. She also spoke in support of Chair Randall's Earth Day Board Member Initiative on the history of environmental review of land development applications and made recommendations for re-establishing an effective review process in October 2020.

### Other

LTE Working Group—An initial meeting of about six members was held where Seth Heald discussed his dos and don'ts of writing letters to the editor. His suggestions were much appreciated.

Plastic—GFG co-sponsored with EcoAction Arlington a discussion on June 16 about the virtual film screening of "The Story of Plastic."

Global Pandemic and Climate Change—Natalie Pien's **LTE** in the April 22 LoudounNow included lessons learned from the pandemic, a warning against a return to business as usual and a challenge to build a life-sustaining society fueled by clean, renewable sources of energy.

*Norbert Pink is the chair of the Great Falls Group.*

## Piedmont Group update

by Kirk Bowers



Piedmont Group members attended one of the biweekly demonstrations at Dominion headquarters in Charlottesville (photo courtesy of Kirk Bowers).

The Piedmont Group is active and well in Central Virginia during these times of national crisis.

Our last event was a virtual online program on April 16, 2020 that was free and open to the public. At the program, Joan Chapman, of Climate Reality Project, along with Gudrun Campbell, a local leader of the Youth Climate Strike, talked about preparing for the climate crisis. Staff from Charlottesville and Albemarle shared the status of their climate action plans. The program was hosted by the Piedmont Group and Charlottesville Chapter National Organization for Women and was well attended.

Several years ago, the James River Water Authority filed an application for a permit from the Army Corps of

Engineers to construct a water pump station on top of Rassawek, the Monacan Indian historic capital. In April, the Army Corps of Engineers advertised for written public comments with a comment submittal deadline of June 7, 2020. More than 12,000 comments were filed by individuals and organizations from across the state, including local Piedmont Group members. Comments filed with the Corps included numerous requests for a public hearing and requests to relocate the pump station two miles upstream along the James River. At this time, we are awaiting a decision by the Corps to conduct a public hearing on the pump station.

Albemarle County has made significant progress developing a climate action plan over the past four years.

Beginning in 2016, Piedmont Group executive committee members began encouraging Albemarle County supervisors to develop and draft a climate action plan. We helped draft resolutions, participated in community input sessions during the plan development stages and worked to influence county supervisors.

In March 2020, Albemarle County published a request for review comments of the draft climate action plan. The Piedmont Group submitted comments to Albemarle County in May. Two board members responded positively to our comments. At a work session held on June 17, 2020, Albemarle County staff presented the draft climate action plan to the Board of Supervisors for review and approval. The Albemarle County budget includes more than \$500,000 for hiring staff to oversee and implement the plan.

Piedmont Group members continue to participate in biweekly Resist Dominion demonstrations protesting the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. The protests began over five years ago and continue every other Wednesday at noon in front of Dominion headquarters on Hydraulic Road in Charlottesville.

We are hoping to schedule free in-person programs to the public when health conditions improve and it is safe to meet in groups.

*Kirk Bowers is the conservation chair of the Piedmont Group.*

## Virginia Chapter at-large and group elections: Updates and timelines

by Linda Muller

This year the Virginia Chapter will hold elections for four at-large executive committee positions to serve for two years. The nominating committee is seeking dedicated members in good standing who wish to contribute their talents, knowledge and experience in helping make the Virginia Chapter a dynamic and influential environmental organization. Here is the opportunity! Please contact me, Linda Muller, at [lcnuller@mindspring.com](mailto:lcnuller@mindspring.com) if you are interested in serving or would like to submit a member's name for nomination.

Virginia Chapter at-large and group elections timeline:

July-August 2020—Solicitation of nominees for four at-large seats. Goal is to have more candidates than vacancies. Increasing diversity across the organization's leadership team is important.

September 2020—Virginia Chapter Nominating Committee reports out candidates for at-large positions. Names and candidate bios to be published in the Fall Virginia Sierran, which includes ballots and balloting instructions.

Chapter ExCom and all group ExCom voting will be done using Sierra Club National's electronic voting system. Since this is the first year where e-voting will be used for all elections,

a paper ballot for the at-large elections will still appear in the Fall Virginia Sierran. Members should vote using one method or the other.

October 16, 2020—Deadline for groups to provide communications coordinator with a list of candidates and the link to the group website where bios, statements and photos are located.

November 22, 2020—Deadline for all ballots/e-ballots to be postmarked/submitted for at-large and group board elections.

*Linda Muller is the chair of the nominating committee 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.

**Blue Ridge:** Tom Eick  
434-277-5491  
[ThomasEick4@gmail.com](mailto:ThomasEick4@gmail.com)

**Chesapeake Bay:** John Luker  
757-337-4092  
[4solar+SC@gmail.com](mailto:4solar+SC@gmail.com)

**Falls of the James:** Joe Brancoli  
804-502-9502  
[omethid@hotmail.com](mailto:omethid@hotmail.com)

**Great Falls:** Norbert Pink  
703-264-7445  
[norbertsierra@aol.com](mailto:norbertsierra@aol.com)

**Mount Vernon:** Rick Keller  
703-625-9055  
[rkeller49@verizon.net](mailto:rkeller49@verizon.net)

**New River Valley:** Rick Shingles  
540-921-7324  
[shingles@vt.edu](mailto:shingles@vt.edu)

**Piedmont:** Donna Shaunesey  
434-996-0392  
[shaunesey@hotmail.com](mailto:shaunesey@hotmail.com)

**Rappahannock:** Richard Eggeling  
443-472-8264  
[rich.sue.sc@gmail.com](mailto:rich.sue.sc@gmail.com)

Bill Johnson  
540-657-1733  
[billatthelake@comcast.net](mailto:billatthelake@comcast.net)

**Roanoke:** Daniel Crawford  
540-343-5080  
[dbcrawford@cox.net](mailto:dbcrawford@cox.net)

**Shenandoah:** Pete Bsumek  
540-421-4105  
[pkbsumek@gmail.com](mailto:pkbsumek@gmail.com)

**Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO):** Gary Kosciusko  
703-946-8111  
[novahiker@cox.net](mailto:novahiker@cox.net)

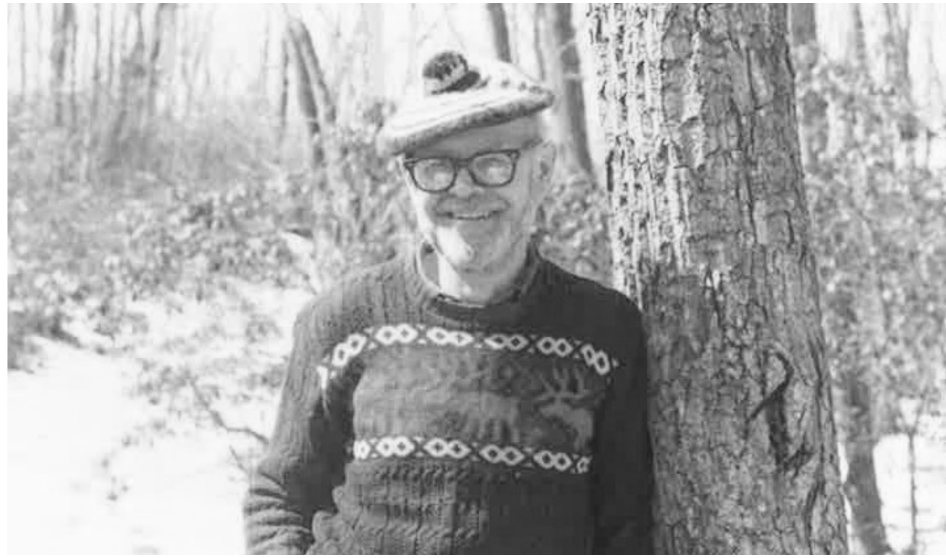
**York River:** Tyla Matteson  
804-275-6476  
[tmatteson1@mindspring.com](mailto:tmatteson1@mindspring.com)

## Celebrating a milestone in the life of Walter Wells

by Gary Kosciusko

This July, we in the Virginia Chapter celebrate (to the extent we can during a pandemic) the 100th birthday of Walter Wells, a lifetime Sierra Club member, a Leader Emeritus of the Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings Group (SCPRO) and a member of the Greatest Generation. Walter has had a long and distinguished association with the Club since April 1966, shortly after he and his family moved from San Francisco to Summit, New Jersey. In 1969 he helped reorganize the New Jersey Group of the Atlantic Chapter (which encompassed all the states east of the Mississippi River at the time). He then helped organize the New Jersey Chapter and subsequently served as vice chair and chair of that chapter until his employer transferred him to Washington, DC, in late 1974.

Once in Washington, Walter immediately engaged with the local Metropolitan Washington Group of the Potomac Chapter (when that chapter encompassed DC, MD, VA and WV). He served as conservation chair and chair of the that group, as well as group delegate to the chapter. He also served as secretary, vice chair, conservation chair, and chair of the chapter. In fact, he remembers representing the Potomac Chapter at the inaugural meeting of the Old Dominion Chapter (later re-



Walter as he led a hike in Shenandoah National Park on March 19, 1978 (photo courtesy of Sue Auerbach).

named the Virginia Chapter) in 1977.

As if that were not enough, Walter was also an outings leader, and for 15 years he was actively involved in trail building and maintenance in Rock Creek Park, Prince William Forest Park, and Shenandoah National Park under the auspices of the Sierra Club's Metropolitan Washington Regional Outings Program and the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club. This meant doing things that would be a challenge for many men half his age, like clearing blowdowns and building bridges across streams.

In the early 1990s, Walter became

outings chair of the New Columbia Chapter, predecessor to the DC Chapter. Between 1987 and 1992, when DC developers wanted to build a road that would have encroached on portions of Glover Archbold Park, he served as the Sierra Club representative to the neighborhood committee that successfully picketed, went to court and eventually thwarted and reversed the plan. To demonstrate his commitment, Walter himself had carried a picket sign during the morning rush hour for a one-year period prior to that.

Walter has a wonderful combination of intelligence, knowledge and

experience, combined with a temperament of diplomacy and a wry sense of humor that tends to disarm people. On the rare occasion when there was a crisis or disagreement, he could be counted on to be a calming influence, ultimately finding a resolution satisfactory to all parties. Walter told a story about how he led a Club outings group that came in contact with loggers who held strong anti-Sierra Club views. Somehow they came together in a respectful conversation that left the loggers feeling that perhaps Sierra Club members were honorable people after all.

Walter continued to lead Sierra Club day hikes into his eighties, before he and his wife Luella moved to a senior living community, where Luella unfortunately passed away in 2009. The following year, at its Fall Gathering, the Virginia Chapter informally recognized Walter's many contributions to the Club over the years. He participated in an oral interview for the SCPRO History Project in 2017, and his mind is as sharp as ever. If anyone wants to send best wishes to Walter, please email Gary at [NOVAHIKER@cox.net](mailto:NOVAHIKER@cox.net) for contact information.

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

## The crossroads of racial justice, climate change and public transportation

by Cheri Conca

When we think about systemic racism, police departments, employment, education, housing and healthcare often come to mind. But what about racism in our transportation system?

People of color disproportionately rely on transit to connect to jobs, shopping, doctors and everywhere else they need or want to go. Restaurant, retail and waste management employees and home health and hospital workers don't have the option of working remotely, yet their work is essential to all. On top of transit issues, thoughtlessly planned highways cut through minority communities, effectively ripping those communities apart and isolating residents.

People of color face multiple transportation hardships, such as,

- Racially biased and harsher treatment by transit police,
- Fares that are unaffordable for many,
- Reduced service due to the COVID-19 pandemic on routes that may already have been providing insufficient service,

• Transit-related exposure to COVID-19 in a prevaccine world, compounded by an increased likelihood of death from COVID-19 due to disproportionate exposure to air pollution from vehicle emissions that waft through homes near highways, exposing people to increased risks of asthma and heart disease.

How much more difficult can it be to get to where you need to go?

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement and COVID-19, the nation's high beams are finally focused on these issues, presenting the opportunity to implement solutions that simultaneously tackle racial, health and climate injustice. The future of transit may be blurry right now, but we have to create a long-term vision for a post-vaccine world. Transit must be prioritized despite the current lower ridership due to the pandemic

Full funding for transit is crucial. There is speculation that a forthcoming federal stimulus package will focus infrastructure dollars on roads, bridges and tunnels. While that is great

news for road construction workers and private equity firms that invest in infrastructure, that type of spending focuses largely on improvements that will be enjoyed by those who have the privilege of owning a car.

Funds need to be directed toward expanding transit to help connect communities to where they need to go. Rather than viewing transit in terms of a balance sheet that tips toward the negative, decision makers need to see it as an essential service that invests in the overall wealth of our people. Investment in no or low fares, increased frequency of buses, expanded routes and times of service and an overhaul of transit enforcement will generate the kind of transportation system that takes cars off the road, reduces sickening greenhouse gas emissions and provides good-paying transit jobs.

To take it a step further, now is a good time for transit authorities to develop plans to transition from fossil fuel buses to electric. Communities from Alexandria, Virginia to Seattle to Los Angeles already have such plans in

place. Together we can drive elected officials to enact strategies and dedicate funding to eliminate pollution-spewing buses that ruin our climate and people's health.

As is usually the case when coming to a crossroads, important decisions must be made. Fully funding equitable, accessible and affordable public transportation is the right direction for our leaders to take. Even during this time of deep suffering and social distancing, we can use our collective power to push decision makers and those who hold the purse strings to build a better public transportation system that benefits all people and communities, serves those who need it the most, dismantles the racism that is layered into the current system and reduces the greenhouse gas emissions that sicken our most vulnerable neighbors.

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

## The three little pigs

by Ivy Main

You remember the story of the Three Little Pigs. First the little pigs built themselves a house out of straw, but the big, bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew it down. Barely escaping with their lives, the little pigs built a new house out of sticks, but again the big, bad wolf blew it down. Wiser at last, the little pigs built their third house out of brick, and they lived happily ever after because the wolf could not blow it down.

When you were a child, you probably did not realize what must be obvious to you now: the story is really about the importance of building codes. Shoddy construction brings nothing but grief, as the little pigs learned, and in the end it costs you more than if you had used high-quality materials right from the start.

Virginia is in the final stages of adopting an update to its residential building code, a process the Board of Housing and Community Development undertakes every three years.

In addition to ensuring the safety of wiring and plumbing and so forth, the Uniform Statewide Building Code sets standards that determine whether a new home is drafty and expensive to heat and cool or will be snug, healthy and frugal with energy.

Unfortunately for Virginians, the board is currently bowing to pressure from the homebuilders' lobby and proposing to continue outdated efficiency standards instead of adopting the more energy-saving provisions of the latest International Energy Conservation Code, or even going beyond the code to Earth Craft or Passive House standards.

In spite of the global pretensions of its name, this code is a national model code. Virginia law specifically instructs the board to refer to it in adopting provisions that permit buildings to be constructed at least cost "consistent with recognized standards of health, safety, energy conservation and water conservation." The code suggests that the

board may go beyond it for purposes of health and safety but should not fall short of its standards.

It's true that better-insulated houses cost builders slightly more to build. They pass along the added costs if they can, but if buyers won't pay more, the higher costs cut into profits. This being bad for business, builders prefer to lobby for lower standards that are cheaper to meet, insisting they have only the poor buyers' pocketbooks at heart.

Their argument is, if you will pardon the expression, hogwash. A well-built house might cost a buyer or a tenant a smidgen more in rent or on a mortgage, but the money saved on heat and electricity will more than make up the difference. Efficient houses are also healthier and more comfortable and have a higher resale value. Claiming that low-income residents will benefit from low standards is both wrong and, frankly, obnoxious.

The climate crisis also makes it

urgent that we use building codes to reduce our fossil fuel use. The Virginia Clean Economy Act will transition the electric sector to clean energy, but it does not require buildings to become more efficient. Yet buildings represent 40% of all energy use, and houses typically last between 40 and 100 years. Some retrofits can be made later, at higher cost, but the cheapest and simplest approach is to build houses snugly to begin with.

Our sustainability chair, Bill Peniman, has submitted comments to the Board of Housing and Community Development on behalf of the Virginia Chapter urging, at a minimum, full adoption of the International Energy Conservation Code.

*Ivy Main is the conservation and renewable energy chair of the Virginia Chapter.*

## Fossil fuels

continued from page 1

plant developer over the health and participation of Virginians, and moved forward with their decision during a time of unprecedented health crisis. Charles City County potentially faces three pieces of fossil fuel infrastructure: the Chickahominy Gas Plant, the C4GT Gas Plant and the Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project pipeline. In addition, Charles City County is also host to a landfill and a sewage treatment plant.

With this decision, DEQ and the citizen boards indicate their comfort with Virginia turning Charles City County into a sacrifice zone. There is no consideration of the cumulative impact that all these polluter facilities will have on the county's majority minority community.

The fight against this Chickahominy Gas Plant continues, and you can help by connecting with the community group Concerned Citizens of Charles City County, or C5 on their Facebook page. Contact Gustavo.Angeles@sierraclub.org for more information.

### VNG HIP Project

The Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project is the newest pipeline infrastructure proposed for Virginia. Pipelines Coordinator Lynn Godfrey has led our Chapter work, and helped expand our collaborative efforts fighting this project. It would impact three

regions of the state, in Northern Virginia, Central Virginia and the Hampton Roads Area (Chesapeake) with pipeline and new or expanded compressor stations. Its proposed Gidley Compressor Station site is surrounded by some of the most populous neighborhoods in Chesapeake and is the nexus for two other speculative pipelines, the ACP and the Southside Connector. The Compressor Station would bring dangers from particulate matter emissions that would further lower air quality, and impact those with asthma, COPD, and other existing respiratory conditions. Our local groups have provided invaluable assistance spreading awareness about the project, in participating in the regulatory process from the State Corporation Commission (SCC). Susan Bonney, of the Great Falls Group has led outstanding educational programming in Northern Virginia, published letters to the editor and provided public comments to the SCC. The open comment period from the SCC was met with an incredible number of submissions in opposition to the project, and an unprecedented effort to oppose the project has helped lead to the June 26 "preliminary ruling" from the SCC that questioned the project's viability, owing to the C4GT Plant's lack of funding (the HIP would supply this proposed plant), and the timeline for

rate recovery on the project. The preliminary ruling on VNG's Header Improvement Project sheds a crucial light on the project's risk and the burden it places on communities and ratepayers. Opposition continues as the final decision from the SCC is anticipated later in the year. Learn more about the coalition working on this event at [stophip.org](http://stophip.org) and connect with Lynn. [Godfrey@sierraclub.org](mailto:Godfrey@sierraclub.org) to learn more.

### Mountain Valley Pipeline

In 2018, the Advisory Council for Environmental Justice addressed the justice concerns of both the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines and recommended that neither project be built. They flagged that consultation with Virginia Tribes was "woefully inadequate." There was minimal consultation with cultural or historical resource agencies, and construction efforts with Mountain Valley Pipeline began without sufficient Tribal consultation. This lack of consultation resulted in disturbances and harms to sacred sites, and it continues as the Monacan and Sapponi Tribes have asked the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for additional outreach and engagement on the MVP Southgate extension.

Unfortunately, MVP Southgate has now received its Certificate of Public Convenience and Need from FERC, but

the project requires additional certifications from the North Carolina DEQ to proceed. DEQ has refused to require water certifications for the extension, but DEQ and the Air Pollution Control Board have an opportunity to require a permit for the project's Lambert Compressor Station for Southgate, to be sited in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Be on the lookout for MVP, LLC to also ask for renewal, as the original certificates expire on Oct 13, 2020.

Visit <https://nomvpsouthgate.org> and contact [jessica.sims@sierraclub.org](mailto:jessica.sims@sierraclub.org) to get involved with the fights against MVP and MVP-Southgate.

Want to learn more?

- Visit <https://vasierra.club/pipelines> for the July 1 recording "Robeson Rises: Virtual Film Screening and Panel Discussion" featuring pipeline fighters from West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina.

- RSVP for the July 16 "Fossil Fuel Infrastructure in VA" at [vasierra.club/fossilfuels](https://vasierra.club/fossilfuels)

- Contact [jessica.sims@sierraclub.org](mailto:jessica.sims@sierraclub.org) or 804-366-0745

*Jessica Sims is the Richmond community outreach coordinator and Gustavo Angeles is the environmental justice program coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.*

## 2020 Annual Gathering

by Joe Brancoli

Calling all Virginia Chapter Sierra Club members and other interested parties!

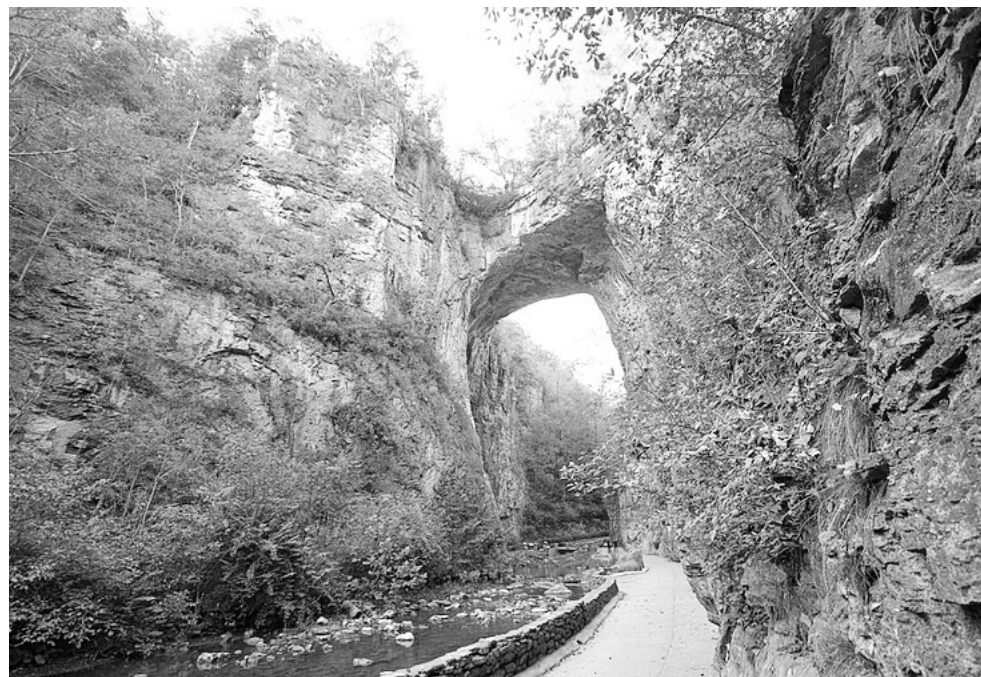
COVID-19 restrictions permitting, our 2020 Annual Gathering (more appropriately, Group Summit) is scheduled for Saturday November 7, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center 40 miles northeast of Roanoke.

It's interesting to note that Sierra Club played a vital role in establishing the 1500 acre Natural Bridge State Park in September 2016; however, this venue was primarily selected for its somewhat central location, seating capacity (120), reasonably priced food and all-day refreshment (and lodging if needed), easy access off I-81 and beautiful setting.

Our Annual Gathering is the only occasion when Virginia Chapter staff, our leaders, seasoned Sierra Club veterans, experts (whose articles and reports we often read) and our valued new Chapter members can all get to know one another and share ideas.

Changing this event from a weekend retreat to a one-day event after the general election this year has allowed the planning committee to focus on three criteria for 2020: minimize cost to all attendees, minimize staff workload and attract the maximum number of Club members in our state (especially those in south-western Virginia).

As those of us who have participated in past Gatherings can attest, this event is informative, promotes camaraderie and boosts club morale.



Located in the James River Valley, Natural Bridge is a 215-foot-tall limestone gorge created by Cedar Creek. It is listed as a National Historic Landmark on the National Register of Historic Places (photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons).

raderie and boosts club morale.

Satisfying the needs of all participants at this year's event is paramount, so an a la carte experience will be offered with cost decided by each attendee. For a very low base price (entry fee) of \$15, members can hear interesting speakers, participate in Group presentations, meet old and new friends and enjoy soft beverages throughout the day. (Note: this option does not include lunch.)

A modest \$35 covers the cost of entry fee plus hot, complete Italian buffet lunch served in the large, well-appointed

ballroom the Chapter has rented for this event. Weather permitting, during the 90-minute lunch break anyone wishing to stretch their legs will have time to take in the unique Limestone Bridge Gorge itself. Please refer to the agenda for details.

For those of us traveling from afar, rooms can be booked at a very reasonable rate of \$80 per night. To spare our Richmond staff the burden of ensuring accommodations meet individual needs, each Club member wishing to stay overnight should call 540-291-2121 and ask for Reservations. You

will need to identify yourself as a Sierra Club member as a block of rooms has been reserved for this event.

It would be more accurate to label this event a "Group Summit" as each Chapter group will be invited to make a presentation of their own wins and losses of the year and share ideas for the future, bearing in mind that in this post-election period all groups have an excellent opportunity to prepare and plan for 2021. In addition we already have two guest speakers, Chief Kenneth Branham of the Monacan Indian Nation (with strong current and ancestral ties to Natural Bridge) and Dr. Melissa Baker, the new head of the Virginia state park system.

Of course no meeting of this nature would be complete without presentations and reports on important issues by our esteemed staff.

We encourage everyone to register as soon as possible! Refunds will be given if the event is canceled, and refunds will be made to individuals who must cancel by October 16th.

Please go to <https://vasierra.club/gathering> to register or if you have any questions.

We look forward to seeing you there!

*Joe Brancoli is the vice 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](mailto: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 Tim Cywinski at [tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org](mailto:tim.cywinski@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 Tim Cywinski at [tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org](mailto:tim.cywinski@sierraclub.org)**

#### Hampton Roads

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Hampton Roads. **Contact Ann Creasy at [Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org](mailto:Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org)** or visit <https://vasierra.club/hr>

#### Richmond

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in the Richmond metropolitan area. **Contact Jessica Sims at [jessica.sims@sierraclub.org](mailto:jessica.sims@sierraclub.org)** or visit <https://vasierra.club/rva>

#### Northern Virginia

Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Northern Virginia. **Contact Cheri Conca at [cheri.conca@sierraclub.org](mailto:cheri.conca@sierraclub.org)** or visit <https://vasierra.club/nova>



## Offshore wind is happening in Virginia!

by Eileen Woll

Offshore wind is happening here in Virginia, and it is happening now.

In June 2020, Virginia became the first in the nation to stand offshore wind turbines in federal waters. With its Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project, Virginia is also in line to be home to the nation's largest offshore wind project—bringing 2,600 megawatts of clean energy by 2026, powering over 650,000 homes.

For over a decade, thousands of Virginia climate activists and hundreds of stakeholders (businesses, public officials and community leaders) have worked together to see offshore wind happen in Virginia. Congratulations to us all!

Virginia must now ensure that offshore wind is done right and brought online in a way that is fair, equitable and provides benefits for all Virginians.

More than one in ten Virginia residents live below the federal poverty threshold. With offshore wind, Virginia can help confront income inequality by creating more and higher paying jobs for residents with limited economic opportunity.

Researchers estimate that a full build-out of the offshore wind industry can create over 14,000 jobs in Virginia. These are high-paying, local, career-length jobs that can employ high school and college grads, job changers, returning citizens and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce.

Coupling Virginia's robust network of community colleges, trade schools, world-class universities and labor apprenticeship programs with investments in the state's workforce development, offshore wind can provide job opportunities for a broad swath of Virginians including people in low-income communities.

In addition to tremendous job opportunities, offshore wind turbines made and constructed with American parts and labor also bring significant cost savings. Globally, costs have



*The first turbine installed in federal waters, part of the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project, was completed in late June 2020. The Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project is a demonstration project developed by Dominion Energy and Ørsted (photo courtesy of Ørsted).*

plunged 32% in the past year, and industry experts anticipate even further price drops as the U.S. builds its own manufacturing and supply chain instead of importing European parts.

To capture the job-creating and cost-saving benefits of offshore wind development, Virginia must quickly train and deploy a large and diverse workforce to support the construction of wind turbines along with the manufacturing of their parts. A workforce development plan must be produced and implemented, and investment must be made in job-training programs, especially pre-employment programs.

Throughout July, the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy will be soliciting comments from the public to inform the development of both a 100% clean energy plan and a clean energy workforce development plan. It is important that the department hears from a diverse array of voices of Virginians. We will be working with numerous partners to ensure that especially the voices of low-income

communities and communities of color are heard, their feedback incorporated and a diverse and robust plan is crafted and exhaustively implemented.

Virginia is on track to fulfill its clean energy goals of generating 5,300 megawatts of offshore wind by 2035. Let's now turn our focus to fulfilling our goal to employ over 14,000 Virginians in this new, exciting clean energy industry.

Visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/offshore-wind> for more information on offshore wind and to take action today!

Congrats again, Virginia!

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



*Virginia Chapter's offshore energy program director, Eileen Woll, with the first turbines of the Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project (photo courtesy of Eileen Woll).*

## Chautauqua Institution offering free lectures to the public

by John Luker

The Chautauqua Institution and the Sierra Club are a lot alike in that both were founded in the late 1800s and a lot of people have never heard of them.

I have been going to the Chautauqua Institution since the late 1980s, and I find it fascinating. During its Summer Assembly, it has daily lectures, normally at an amphitheater

that holds about 6000 people. This year, due to the pandemic, the 2020 Summer Assembly will host all events online for free (gate tickets are normally about \$500 for one week).

The Assembly runs from June 28 through August 30 and will include various themes, including climate change. All events are at 10:45 a.m. unless otherwise noted. There are also

Post-lecture Community Conversations on the Virtual Porch. Go to <https://chq.org/season/chq-assembly-registration> to sign up.

Speakers include Christine Todd Whitman, former EPA Administrator under George W. Bush; Janis Searles Jones, CEO of Ocean Conservancy; Katharine Wilkinson with Project Drawdown; and Christiana Figueres, vice-

chair of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

There are 9 weeks in the entire season. Enjoy a virtual smorgasbord of ideas.

*John Luker is the chair of the Chesapeake Bay Group.*

## Understanding climate denialism

by Kayli Ottomanelli



According to a recent poll by the Washington Post and the Kaiser Family Foundation, about 40% of Americans believe climate change is a true crisis and action is necessary to prevent its disastrous consequences. Although this percentage of Americans is up from less than 25% five years ago, it means roughly 60% of the nation still does not believe in climate change. It seems difficult to grasp how individuals can continue to deny a phenomenon that generates measurable changes in global temperatures and sea levels. However, the answer lies in that climate change is as much of a political and economic issue as it is a scientific one. As such, many of the arguments used to deny climate change are based on science denialism.

Science denial is an issue many environmentalists have grown quite familiar with and it revolves around the rejection of well-supported scientific concepts in favor of radical ideas that please a small base of supporters. In regards to the climate crisis specifically, those relying on science denialism like to argue that the science of climate change is unreliable and largely

disputed. Likely repeating the claims of politicians like Donald Trump, these individuals often remark that scientists are undecided on whether climate change is a result of human activity or a part of natural climate variability.

According to an article by Solomon Hsiang and Robert Kopp, titled “An Economist’s Guide to Climate Change Science,” published in 2018 in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 32, this argument is completely baseless as scientists are virtually certain (at least 99% probability) that modern warming trends exceed the bounds of natural variability.

Scientists commonly use climate models to simulate changes in weather and climate over thousands of years. These climate model simulations have demonstrated that the only possible way to achieve current global surface temperatures is to include greenhouse gas emissions from humans. Model simulations run with only natural forces predict very different global temperatures than those that currently exist. The results of these climate models align with the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that there is “no convincing alternative explanation” for global warming other than “human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse gases,” per an article in *The Atlantic* by Ibram Kendi titled “What the Believers Are Denying.”

Although the issue may seem relatively straightforward, it takes more than facts to dissuade science denialists. Paul Thacker explains why, in an article that appeared on May 14, 2020 in *Drilled News*. Its title says it all: “The Thing About Science Denial and Disin-

formation Is It Works.” Many individuals already struggle to separate facts from falsehoods and this becomes especially difficult when large corporations spread deceitful narratives to confuse the public.

Although these companies will argue their misinformation is harmless, misconceptions matter. John Cook, in a March 24, 2020 article titled “A history of FLICC: the 5 techniques of science denial” explains why misconceptions are so important. Widespread misconceptions can lower public understanding and reduce trust in science. Therefore, providing facts about climate change is only the first step to reforming denialists. Explaining the science provides the basis for understanding, but it doesn’t necessarily protect individuals from being misled by false information and large corporations in the future.

Instead, identifying the denial techniques used to distort science can help people identify when information is wrong. Two common denial techniques are cherry picking and impossible expectations. Mr. Cook also appeared in a documentary series in 2015, titled “UQ DENIAL101, 6.3.1.1, Inoculation Theory.” Cherry picking entails carefully selecting data that appears to confirm one position, while ignoring data that contradicts that position. For example, some science denialists have made the argument that global warming ended in 1998 and humans do not need to reduce emissions. However, this is cherry picking information as it focuses on one specific time period and ignores the full picture, which is that global temperatures have increased since 1998.

The other denial technique, impossible expectations, involves demanding unrealistic standards of certainty before acting on science. For instance, many denialists claim the science behind climate change is uncertain because scientists cannot be 100% sure that warming results from human activity. However, scientists are 99% certain that human emissions increase warming, and demanding 100% certainty before acting is an unrealistic expectation. By presenting climate facts and explaining the fallacies used to contradict them to science denialists, we dramatically increase the chance of altering the peoples’ perspectives.

Brian Walker and David Salt wrote “Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World” in 2006. They argue that despite humans’ intelligent and adaptive nature, when it comes to how we view ourselves and the world, we often struggle to accept change. “Throughout history, it has been easier to deny or ignore information at odds with the prevailing worldview than to change it.” Climate change is a difficult global issue and many individuals find it easier to ignore or deny it rather than alter their behaviors to address it. However, by correcting misinformation, identifying denial techniques and compelling those in denial to accept reality, we can convince the remaining 60% of Americans that climate change is indeed a crisis that requires swift action.

*Kayli Ottomanelli is an intern with the Rappahannock Group.*

## Greetings from the Chapter’s new outings chair

by Ralph Grove

I’ve recently taken over the role of outings chair for the Virginia Chapter. The timing coincides with my (second) retirement from teaching, as well as with the ongoing pandemic and the historical and overdue social change that we’re now witnessing. Of course, these changes present us with numerous challenges and opportunities, and I hope that we can build on the moment to make our outings program stronger and more accessible.

My own history with Sierra Club started in the 1980s in Kentucky, where I had my first backpacking experiences in the incomparable Red River Gorge, a canyon system that is located in the Daniel Boone National For-

est. Since then, I’ve hiked over much of the United States and many places abroad.

I became an outings leader in Virginia about 15 years ago, and I have led many hikes in the mountains of western Virginia, where I formerly lived. I’m still inspired by John Muir’s writings (e.g., “My First Summer in the Sierra”), and I believe that our outings program is an essential part of the Sierra Club, both in terms of introducing people to the joy of nature and for attracting new members.

We’re fortunate in Virginia to have many excellent outings opportunities, through Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings and other local group outings

around the state. Though SCPRO’s outings program is currently on hold, through August 31 at least, I continue to hike when I get the chance, as do many of you I’m sure, with proper precautions.

We can also enjoy some of the great virtual outings that are available online. We hope to continue to provide training for outings leaders this year and to use this opportunity to build our capacity for the time when outings resume. If you’re interested in becoming an outings leader, I would love to talk with you.

I recently sent an email to all registered outings leaders in Virginia who are not affiliated with SCPRO. If you be-

lieve you fall in that category but did not receive an email from me, please contact me.

I’m going to try to write more about favorite places for outdoors fun (including biking, kayaking, etc.) in the future, and would love to hear your recommendations about great places to visit in Virginia, especially those that are less well known. Please write to me at [rfgrove@icloud.com](mailto:rfgrove@icloud.com) if you know of a great place for an outing that you’d like to share.

*Ralph Grove is the outings chair of the Virginia Chapter.*

## Appreciation for our interns

by Mary-Stuart Torbeck, Jessica Sims and Tim Cywinski

“What’s the typical day look like?” is a question echoed by every intern on their first day working at the Chapter. The short answer to this question is, well, there isn’t one. While we do our best to be consistent and meet deadlines, all staff must be ready to react on a moment’s notice. We are working to protect the planet and build a brighter future for all Virginians. This type of work doesn’t occur on a convenient schedule. This is especially true for our interns who must adapt the same as staff. So this article is dedicated to showing thanks to three individuals who we were fortunate to work with during the winter months.



First, there was Liam Flayhart. Liam was overseen by Mary-Stuart and served his internship at the Virginia Chapter for his January term at Randolph-Macon College. His internship period coincided with key moments of the General Assembly session and most certainly contributed to the many successes that the Sierra Club and the environmental community had this past session. Liam wrote the fact-sheets for the bills that the Sierra Club supported. These are instrumental in our lobbying efforts and 2020 had more bills than we have ever seen relative to the environment.

Liam helped plan the first Clean Energy lobby day. The day itself was a huge success. It was a sold out event with an all-star lineup of speakers and ultimately sparked enthusiasm with hundreds of activists who stayed engaged throughout the 60-day session. Liam assisted with everything from folding t-shirts, to preparing the packets for legislators. Liam also quickly learned the lay of the land around the current General Assembly building (which is no easy feat) and dropped off literature to legislators regularly with materials supporting Sierra Club bills. Liam graduated from Randolph-Macon

this spring with a degree in political science and minor in environmental science. We are so thankful for all of the hard work that Liam contributed in a landmark year and wish him well in his future endeavors.



Next, there was the dynamic, sharp and enthusiastic Isabella Dumitrescu, a junior from the University of Richmond, majoring in political science and chemistry, and an executive member of “GreenUR.” Isabella was integral to the Stop the Pipelines campaign, providing significant support for her manager, Jessica, and the Richmond office. She developed and designed educational outreach materials for the newly proposed Virginia Natural Gas Header Improvement Project, helped with our monthly Lunch and Learn programming and designed event flyers and campaign stickers.

An accomplished writer, her strong understanding of environmental issues in Virginia was evident in her ability to discuss and present substantive information to the public about threats to Virginia’s communities. Her eye for design was also crucial as she created customizable and detailed materials that were incredible tools in building a statewide coalition to work on gas infrastructure issues in the state. Her help for the Chapter was so appreciated as it strengthened the work of our organization. We wish her the very best for her next chapter and a successful senior year.

Finally, there was Paige Wesselink. Paige is a recent graduate from Roanoke College and was supervised by her fellow alumni Tim Cywinski. Paige proved to be a jack-of-all-trades. Some days she assisted with writing talking points and press releases, others she was creating unique and well-designed tabling materials and others she was updating the Chapter’s website. Another top highlight of Paige’s work includes

the 2020 Climate, Energy, and Justice scorecard, which she worked tirelessly with Bob Shippee to create. At the beginning of her internship, Paige asked to be given “minimal details” on each assigned project so she could have the freedom to think outside the box. This approach paid dividends as Paige continually exceeded expectations. It



is also worth noting that the majority of Paige’s internship took place during quarantine. Even though remote working poses major challenges, especially for interns, the quality of Paige’s work never faltered and she never missed a deadline.

The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter relies heavily on the support of all of our members, volunteer leaders and, of course, interns. We are better off in many indescribable ways because of the work, effort and passion displayed by Liam, Isabella and Paige. We are confident that each of them will see success in their futures, and we hope they will view their time at the Chapter as a point of pride in their careers.

*Mary-Stuart Torbeck is the senior organizer, Jessica Sims is the Richmond community outreach coordinator and Tim Cywinski is the communications coordinator of the Virginia Chapter.*

### Disaster / Travel / Wilderness First Aid Education

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Sep. 5-7, 2020...Mountain-top retreat at Mountain Lake Biological Station, Pembroke, VA. Cabins \$9/bed on-site or free camping nearby. Hiking trails and free boats, plus grill, campfires and s’mores. Optional CPR/AED & more.

Sep. 26-27 ... Nellysford, VA

Oct. 17-18 or 24-25 ... Washington, DC (SC \$15 off)

Nov. 14-15 ... Charlottesville, VA

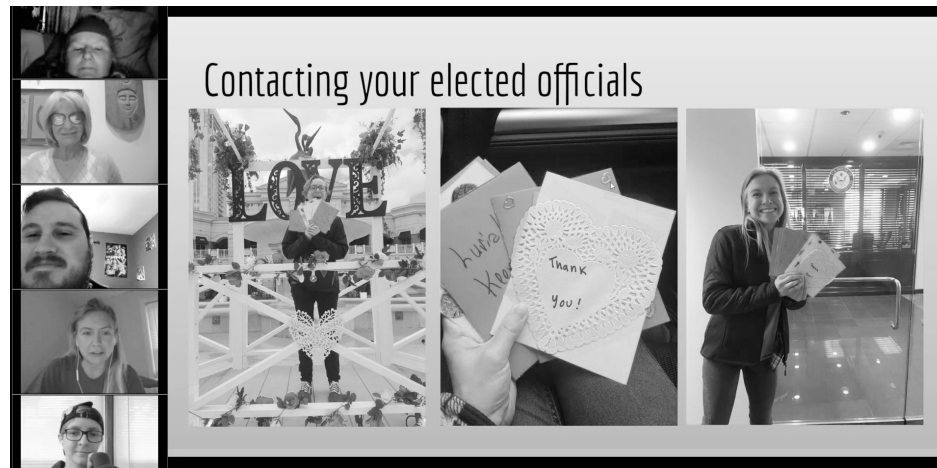
Nov. 21-22 ... Norfolk, VA

Instruction by Matthew Rosefsky, Geo Medic, SOLO Instructor-Trainer, SC Outings Leader, and Volunteer Strategist for SC National “Outdoors for All Campaign.” Cost is \$215. See <https://solowfa.com> for more information and online registration.

## Virtual community building by Hunter Noffsinger

Community is and has always been what holds us all together. After all, at the end of the day, all we have is each other. We keep each other safe, we look out for one another and we look out for our planet. We come together in hard times to lift each other up and fight for what is right and for what our communities need most. From helping recover from natural disasters, to getting people the resources they need during a pandemic and fighting systems of injustice, you will always find community members out helping their neighbors. Whether that be collecting food donations for those who need it or helping rebuild after a hurricane or other natural disaster, community is how we get through hard times.

Let's take the environmental community, for example. We have all come together to help save and protect our planet for current and future generations. When new pipelines are proposed, you'll see so many of us physically out fighting them. When anti-climate legislation is passed, you'll see us writing letters, calling, doing whatever we can to speak up about why we need better policies and legislation to protect our planet. The very same happens when a natural disaster



ter hits. You'll see community mutual aid networks working together to take care of each other, especially when their experiences get pushed under the rug. It is our communities that are making changes in the world.

When COVID-19 started spreading across the United States, I immediately started thinking of ways to keep our community together and engaged. The uncertainty of how long we wouldn't be able to hold in-person meetings and events fueled the need for virtual events and socials even more. We hadn't held too many virtual events in the past, but within the first few weeks of everyone starting to stay home to slow the spread of COVID-19, we man-

aged to pull together a virtual coffee and climate chat and to give others the resources to continue their advocacy from the safety of their homes.

In addition to the initial coffee and climate chat, we have held various virtual meetings and events that were free and open to the public, like virtual climate strikes, letter to the editor workshops, advocacy meetings and socials. Our aim with these spaces has been to make sure those who have the ability and desire to keep up their advocacy have a space and a platform to do so. We also wanted to make sure to give a space for socials and just make sure we are staying connected with each other beyond the realm of

advocacy work. It is equally important to make sure we are taking some time to socialize, though virtually, as we normally would in addition to doing our advocacy work. Recognizing that not everyone has access to the internet or time to spend on advocacy with new hurdles to jump over, these meetings are to hold space to stay engaged with those with whom we can.

Although virtual spaces are not our preferred way to stay connected with those around us, they have become vital in maintaining relationships and organizing around important moments. The sheer power of our communities is seen in this new online space we are all navigating. We have taken this opportunity to connect with people who have previously not been able to attend events, talk about racial inequalities and injustices and come up with new and unique ways to advocate for our planet. Our community continues to come together, and I am grateful for the opportunity to see everyone's faces, hear their voices and brainstorm new ideas.

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

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