



Virginia Sierran

The Official Newsletter of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter
Fall 2024

Amazon claims to power all its operations with renewable energy. If only that were true Ivy Main

When Amazon announced this month that it had achieved 100% renewable energy 7 years ahead of schedule, that sounded like really good news for Virginia. Amazon owns the majority of data centers in Virginia, and those centers are driving up electricity demand, and providing the excuse for Dominion Energy Virginia's plan to renege on its climate commitments.

Imagine if Amazon were running all its data centers on renewable energy, and if other data center operators were to do the same, Dominion could shut down its dirty coal plants in short order and scrap plans for the expensive new gas plants and transmission lines it claims are only needed because of all the new load.

DOMINION ENERGY



A Dominion Energy solar farm in Powhatan County

Unfortunately, Amazon's announcement is so full of asterisks it looks like a starry night. The good news is Amazon's claim that it has purchased enough renewable energy to "match" its energy use is likely true, though its sustainability report doesn't reveal essential details like how much energy the company uses. Amazon claims it is the largest corporate purchaser of renewable energy in the world, an impressive achievement.

Some of this renewable energy is in Virginia, so it is reasonable to say it serves the company's data centers here. A map on Amazon's website shows the company has invested in 19 solar farms in Virginia, with a total capacity around 1,386 MW—about a quarter of all solar installed in Virginia to

SEE AMAZON ON PAGE 7 ➡➡



TEKMAR GROUP

Unlocking Clean Energy Potential With Offshore Wind

Eileen Woll

In August of this year, Virginia took one more giant step towards fulfilling its 100% clean energy goals. The federal BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management) sold the offshore wind (OSW) leasing rights for another large lease area off Virginia's coast. Dominion won those lease rights to develop an area adjacent to its current 2600 megawatt (MW) Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind (CVOW) project. This additional area can support between 2,000 and 4,000 MW of offshore wind energy generation.

We need the vision, goals, and policies to ensure the responsible and equitable development of offshore wind.

In July, Dominion acquired from Avangrid Renewables a third of its Kitty Hawk project off North Carolina's coast. This area now dubbed "CVOW South" can produce 800 MW of power. The entire Kitty Hawk project is capable of producing 3,000 MW total, and comes online via electric transmission line routing into Virginia.

Finally, in September, BOEM put out a Call for a second round of OSW leasing in the Central Atlantic. While I don't think there will be

SEE WIND ON PAGE 2 ➡➡

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

David Grochmal
757-705-9011
dmgrochmal@cox.net

Falls of the James

Joe Brancoli
804-502-9502
joebsierra@gmail.com

Great Falls

Susan Bonney
703-402-9292
sbonney001@aol.com

New River Valley

Kimberley Homer
540-552-3106
homerk@ieee.org

Piedmont

Donna Shaunesey
434-996-0392
shaunesey@hotmail.com

Potomac River Group

Dean Amel
571-327-9799
dean.amel@verizon.net

Rappahannock

Cindy Hodges
540-220-8145
grapesrgud10@gmail.com
Natalie Loeffler
253-381-1062
nloeffler36@gmail.com

Roanoke

Daniel Crawford
540-343-5080
dbcrawford@cox.net

Shenandoah

Pete Bsumek
540-421-4105
pkbsumek@gmail.com

Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings (SCPRO)

Vicky Hsu
240-370-7011
hhueichi@gmail.com

York River

Tyla Matteson
804-275-6476
tmatteson1@mindspring.com

From the Chair



You'd have to be living under a rock not to be painfully aware that we have elections coming up in November.

Regardless of your political viewpoint, these upcoming elections are of monumental importance to issues we all care about deeply, including the environment, human rights and the very functioning of our democracy.

Your engagement matters! I hope you'll not only vote, but consider volunteering in some capacity. In addition to opportunities offered by the party or candidate of your choice,

there is much work to be done to improve the machinery of our elections. This is non-partisan work, and you can spend as much or as little time as you have or want on it. You can also choose the kind of work you are most comfortable with—whether making phone calls, texting, writing letters or postcards, or poll monitoring on election day. It's all important to the smooth functioning of the process.

If you're like me, there's a high startup cost to getting yourself off the dime to do this. Most prominently in my case is the fear of knocking on someone's door or picking up the phone and having them react badly. I've addressed my own fear of being personally attacked by choosing work that the people I contact are less likely to have a negative reaction to: I contact people who risk having their names removed from voter rolls and help them correct their records and, if necessary, register to vote. We do this without regard to the political affiliation of the voter. Come October, I also will be helping to "cure" ballots that are rejected due to insufficient compliance with the local rules. I have not encountered any unpleasantness, with one exception, and most people are grateful for the help. I'm also here to tell you that I survived the unpleasant encounter!!

I hope you'll join me in celebrating our democracy by getting out there and doing something good!

Judy Gayer

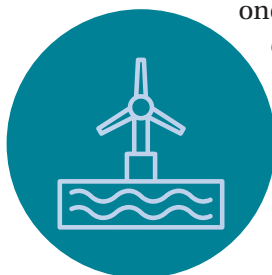
Wind (cont'd from page 1)

additional areas off Virginia's coast for sale, there should be areas adjacent to Kitty Hawk—with power similarly coming online via Virginia—put up for OSW development!

This is ironic. Other east coast states have ambitious OSW goals that exceed the capacity of its current proposed OSW projects. Not true for Virginia! We have solidly on the development books over 8GW of OSW projects that could come online in Virginia in the very near future. We have the projects that secure the massive economic investment and jobs attached to offshore wind. What we need now is the vision, goals, and policies to ensure its responsible and equitable development.

8,000 Virginians for 8,000 MW of Offshore Wind

Stand today as a Virginian for Offshore Wind. Sign our petition and be one of the 8,000 Virginians supporting 8,000 MW of offshore wind. Let's send a strong and mighty signal to all our public officials—federal, state and local—that Virginians want offshore wind right now, right here and done right. Go to www.sierraclub.org/virginia/offshore-wind TODAY!



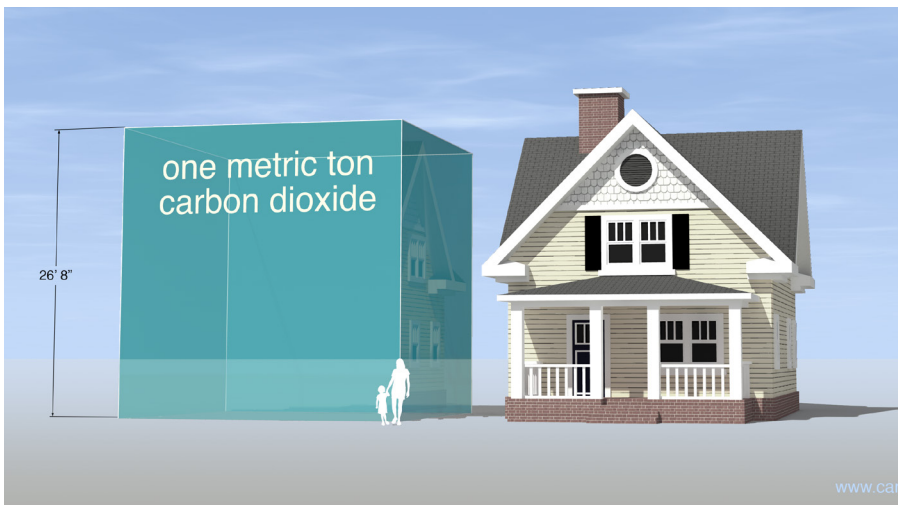
Eileen Woll, Offshore Energy Program Director,
Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

Will Virginia act to cut its #1 source of greenhouse gas emissions?

Cheri Conca

One of the most effective things you can do to fight climate change is to help Virginia achieve a speedy transition to electric vehicles. That's because transportation is the source of nearly half of the climate-threatening emissions in the Commonwealth. While EVs (Electric Vehicles) are becoming prevalent in urban areas, we have a long way to go to make EVs accessible and practical in the rural areas that make up 88% of the Commonwealth. Fortunately, there are simple actions we can take to help build and strengthen EV infrastructure in remote areas, to benefit both residents and travelers alike.

While the Sierra Club's top transportation goal is to take vehicles off the road by increasing access to transit, bike, and pedestrian travel, we also need to work toward electrifying the remaining vehicles that use our roadways. A typical passenger vehicle emits 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide a year. Considering there are more than 8.4 million registered vehicles in Virginia, that's a lot of carbon dioxide, not to mention harmful methane, nitrous oxide and particulate matter that is being released into our environment.



The Biden administration understands how important a robust EV charging network is to the U.S.'s transition away from dirty fossil fuel vehicles, and has rolled out unprecedented transportation electrification incentives for states. Virginia is taking advantage of federal programs to build charging infrastructure, including the NEVI (National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) program which is funded through the IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) and provides \$106M over the next 5 years to build charging stations along Virginia's highways. The Commonwealth has also tapped into \$1.1M in BIL (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) funding to develop the Virginia Department of Energy's Virginia Electric Vehicle Charging Assistance Program for grants to private businesses and public-private partnerships for the installation of EV charging stations in rural or underserved communities.

Utilities are pitching in to help ensure that abundant public charging options are available. Dominion Energy offers a 50% upfront rebate on EV charging construction and installation for businesses and multifamily communities. How much more charging infrastructure is needed? According to Environment Virginia, to reach 25% penetration of EVs, Virginia would need roughly 48,300 fast chargers and Level 2 chargers.

SEE GREENHOUSE ON PAGE 7 ➡



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

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

Hampton Roads: Join this list to get updates about actions, events and ways to get involved in Hampton Roads. ☞
Contact Ann Creasy at Ann.Creasy@sierraclub.org or visit 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 or visit 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 or visit www.sierraclub.org/virginia/northern-virginia-updates



Olivier Honored at Board Retreat

We took the opportunity at our Summer Board retreat to award an Earth Flag to long-time Executive Committee member Wren Olivier, and her husband Tom Olivier for decades of service to the Piedmont Group. They must have held every office and provided so much wisdom and hard work to protect our environment. As always, it was wonderful to meet in person. Thanks to Scott and Carol for the beautiful venue.

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100 West Franklin St.
Mezzanine
Richmond, Virginia 23220

www.sierraclub.org/virginia

Virginia Sierran Editor and Graphic Designer:

Melanie Roberts
editorvirginiasierran@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 for membership and mailing issues and address.changes@sierraclub.org to change your mailing address.

PIEDMONT GROUP

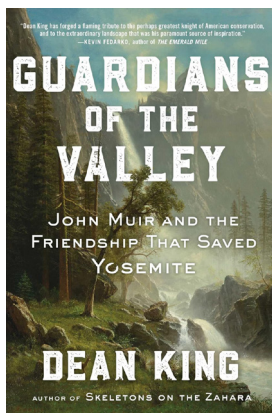
Celebration of Democracy Day



On September 14th, the Piedmont Group organized a Celebration of Democracy Day with the support of several groups, including the Charlottesville Center for Peace and Justice, the UN Association, the Belmont-Carlton Neighborhood Association, the LWV (League of Women Voters), Charlottesville NOW, Veterans for Peace and SERV (UVA's Students for Equity and Reform in Virginia.) We enjoyed fantastic music and delicious treats from a new local minority-owned business. A voter registration drive served to engage attendees in the upcoming election.

Jim Andrews, Chair of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors, kicked off the event by reading the proclamation celebrating democracy which passed unanimously.

Our state representatives spoke eloquently on supporting democracy, including Senator Creigh Deeds, Delegate Katrina Calsen, Delegate Amy Laufer and former Delegate (and Mayor) David Toscano. The past President of the LWV and the President of SERV also participated in the event. The power went out during the event, so we ate free melting ice cream!



Dean King's Guardians of the Valley

In September, we hosted Dean King, author of *Guardians of the Valley: John Muir and the Friendship that Saved Yosemite*. King relishes the adventures involved in making history come to life while at the same time diligently searching out the truth and turning up new historical detail. King is just as eloquent in person off the page as he is in the book. The audience was engaged, enthusiastic (and in a book-buying mood.)

Climate Book Talk

In July, we hosted Lawrence MacDonald, author of *Am I Too Old to Save the Planet? A Boomer's Guide to Climate Action*. A lively speaker, Lawrence engaged the audience in sharing how America's most promising generation allowed climate change to become a planetary emergency and what to do about it. We held the talk at the beautiful Ivy Creek Natural Area's Education Building, a perfect venue for talking about the environment. There was a great turnout and we have gotten more folks engaged with the Group.



A Summer Full of Earth Flags for Environmental Heroes



We had a great time awarding Earth Flags to our favorite environmental heroes this summer. Andy Bowers—who has held our website and various other high-tech issues together for years—does it all while being a new dad, a grad student and doing on-the-ground environmental work in Richmond. Andy is pictured above with Energy Chair Scott Ziemer, Chair Donna Shaunesey and the adorable Anastasia. We're so lucky to have you, Andy!

We also awarded an Earth Flag to the awesome Crozet Trails Crew (top right.) In the past fifteen years, they cleared and maintained ten miles of trails, including nine bridges over creeks, a stairway and a bog bridge. They are at 70% of their \$100,000 goal to fund efforts to build a bridge over Lickinghole Creek.



The Crozet Trails Crew



Kudos to our Amazing Interns

If you've been at Farmer's Markets and other outdoor events this summer you've probably seen our great interns at work. These young college students have been talking to people about the Sierra Club, signing them up for our weekly environmental events email and getting them to sign our petitions regarding ongoing issues.



New Executive Committee Member

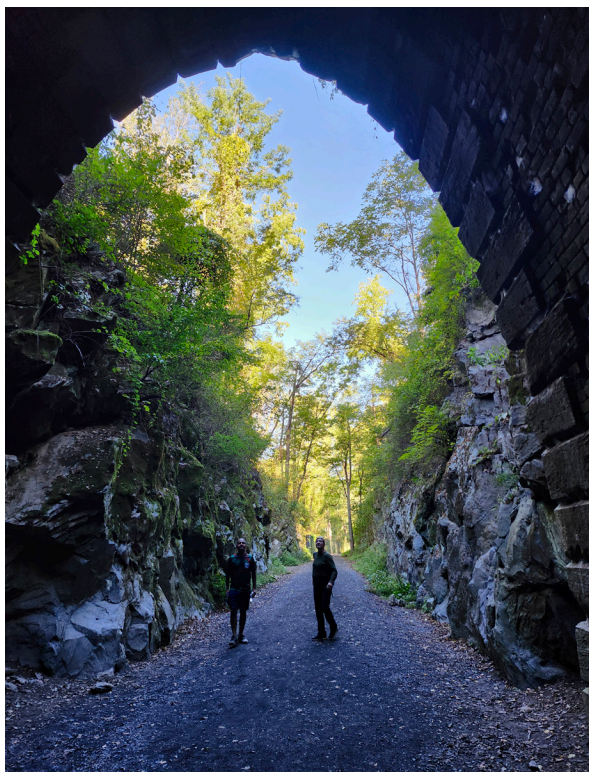
This summer, the Piedmont Group welcomed Alexandra Kwiatkoski to the Executive Committee. Alexandra shared her enthusiasm: "I am very excited to be joining the Executive Committee of the Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club! Activism and volunteerism have always been very important to me, and I have a lot of experience in the nonprofit world, specifically with environmental organizations. So when the opportunity to become an Executive Committee member arose, I felt like it would be a great fit. I'm happy to be able to create some positive change in our community and to be part of such a wonderful group of people!"

In addition to being an advocate for the environment and sustainability, I am also an animal rights activist, and I'm happy to chat if you are interested in learning more about veganism and/or you want to learn about more ways that you can help animals. In my free time, you'll probably catch me with my husband and our dog putzing around Charlottesville, enjoying thrift stores or drinks (or ideally both)".

FALLS OF THE JAMES

Sierra Club Falls of the James Group Blue Ridge Tunnel Hike

SHAVON PEACOCK



Blue Ridge Tunnel hike on September 8, 2024.



Upcoming Falls of the James Hikes

For information on FOJG hikes, visit:
www.sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james

10/19/2024 9:30 am

Varina LandLab Hike at Varina LandLab

11/10/24 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Lower Appomattox River Trail and Battersea Tour

11/23/24 9:30 am—1:00 pm

Five Mile Hike at Pocahontas State Park

It was a beautiful crisp day for The Sierra Club Falls of the James Group (FOJG) 4-mile hike at Blue Ridge Tunnel, near the southern tip of Shenandoah National Park on September 8. Our group of sixteen set off from the largest parking lot at the East Trailhead. We hiked to an elevation of 175 feet to the West Trailhead, then retraced our steps. Forget about the flashlight on your phone; handheld flashlights are a must to navigate the tunnel! Most of the Blue Ridge Tunnel is hard greenstone while some of the tunnel was bricked to prevent rock falls and contain water leaks. The temperature inside is between 55 and 65 degrees.

Built from 1853-1858, the tunnel is 4,273 feet long, and was the longest tunnel in North America at that time. The main engineer, Claudius Crozet designed the tunnel; Irish immigrants and enslaved men toiled from both ends of the tunnel using only hand tools and black gunpowder, meeting in the middle. The railroad ran through the tunnel for 86 years until 1944, when an adjacent tunnel was built to accommodate larger locomotives. The tunnel is located at the convergence of the southern entrance of Shenandoah National Park's Skyline Drive, the northern entrance of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Appalachian Trail, and U. S. Bicycle Route 76. Both Interstate 64 and U. S. 250 cross over the tunnel at Rockfish Gap. The tunnel was opened to pedestrians in 2020.

We ended our adventure at the nearby Blue Mountain Brewery for refreshing libations, lunch, and a lovely view of the mountains. Outings leaders were Shavon Peacock, Ralph Grove, and Glen Besa. If interested in outdoor adventures, check out the FOJG calendar on our website Events/Calendar/ Sierra Club or our Sierra Club Falls of the James Group Meetup group Sierra Club—Falls of the James Group | Meetup .

Amazon (cont'd from page 1)

date. That's terrific. If every company operating in Virginia did as much, we'd be rolling in solar, figuratively speaking.

So what am I complaining about? One problem is that the energy appetite of Amazon's data centers in Virginia far outstrips the output of all of its solar farms here. The other problem is that producing renewable energy in the middle of the day can only very loosely be said to "match" energy used at other times of the day and night. Meeting energy demand 24/7 is harder, and Amazon isn't even trying.

Building solar and wind is cheap; Amazon likely profits from it. Ensuring renewable energy that would provide all the juice for the company's operations every hour of every day would require a heck of a lot of expensive energy storage. Amazon is not doing that.

The energy appetite of Amazon's data centers in Virginia far outstrips the output of all its solar farms here.

Solar delivers electricity only while the sun is shining. Without energy storage, Amazon's data centers run on whatever resource mix the local utility uses. In both Virginia and the wider grid that serves the commonwealth, fossil fuels make up the great majority of the mix. Building more Amazon data centers in Virginia increases the burning of fossil fuels, resulting in more pollution and rising costs borne by the rest of us.

The self-styled climate hero turns out to be a climate parasite, harming people to make itself look good. Combining renewable energy with storage to achieve true carbon neutrality isn't prohibitively expensive. Other leading tech companies appear to be making that extra effort, with Google notable for its commitment to meeting its energy demand with renewable energy and storage on a 24/7 basis.

Amazon's failure to rise to this challenge explains why, in spite of its massive investments in wind and solar, its sustainability report reveals the company's carbon footprint actually rose by 34% since the launch of its Climate Pledge in 2019, when it set a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2040.

That explains why the Science Based Targets initiative—U.N.-backed organization that monitors corporate net-zero plans—removed Amazon from a list of companies taking action on climate goals last year. According to press reports, Amazon failed "to implement its commitment to set a credible target for reducing carbon emissions."

Among those least impressed with the company's efforts are its own workers. Last year, Amazon Employees for Climate Justice accused the company of failing in its climate commitments, and the group released its own report this month alleging multiple climate failures, including using "creative accounting" to inflate its achievements.

If Virginia is serious about meeting the climate challenge, we can't blindly accept rosy claims from corporations whose central goal is not sustainability, but growth. Data centers that don't meet their energy demand on a 24/7 basis from zero-carbon sources located on the same grid are not part of the climate solution, they are part of the problem. And currently, Amazon's data centers are making the problem worse.

Ivy Main, Renewable Energy Co-Chair,
Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club

Greenhouse (cont'd from page 3)

Currently, less than 2% of the vehicles in Virginia are electric and there are less than 3,000 public fast chargers and Level 2 chargers across the Commonwealth. To electrify Virginia, we need all hands on deck, which means we need state funding. Federal funding and utility incentives are a great start, but the Commonwealth needs to chip in to serve residents, especially those in rural areas, and visitors to rural areas who spend dollars as they travel to and through Virginia.

Other states are meeting the challenge to build an EV charging network by supplementing federal and utility investments with state funding. For example:

- 🌲 Maryland offers a rebate of up to \$5,000 to businesses, or state or local government entities for the costs of acquiring and installing qualified EV charging stations
- 🌲 Washington State is using \$65M in state general funds for its EV charging program, half of which will go toward installing chargers in communities most at risk of negative health effects caused by fossil fuel pollution
- 🌲 California has spent \$584 million to build more than 33,000 EV chargers, funded by fees drivers pay when they register cars

Virginia appeared to make some progress toward investing in vehicle electrification when it passed the Electric Vehicle Rebate Program into law in 2021, which would have complemented Federal rebates to help put an EV purchase within reach for lower- and middle-income residents. However, the program never received funding from the state legislature, making the rebate effectively nonexistent. And for the past 3 years in a row, a bill has been introduced into the state legislature that would provide funding to help build public charging stations in rural areas.

Will 2025 be the year that a rural EV charging infrastructure bill passes? You can help make it happen. Email your state senator and delegate and ask them to pass and fund legislation to build rural EV charging infrastructure, and fund the EV Rebate Program. Let them know that private companies are reluctant to invest in rural and less affluent areas, so it is important for the state to complement the limited federal funds that Virginia receives. Let's bring EV charging to every corner of the Commonwealth, so that Virginians and visitors have a real opportunity to reduce tailpipe pollution.

Cheri Conca, Transportation and Smart
Growth Program Manager, Sierra Club
Virginia Chapter

The Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club is over 20,000 members strong.

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

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

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Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

100 W. Franklin St, Mezzanine
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Upcoming FOJG Programs at the Science Museum of Virginia

You too can help move the earth by joining us at the Science Museum of Virginia for the Sierra Club Falls of the James Group 2024-2025 programs. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

October 8, 2024 | 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

FOJG Program—Nuclear Power and the Climate Crisis: Solution or Distraction?

Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220

A discussion from different points of view on what role nuclear power may play in helping us transition from fossil fuel. Dr. Supathorn Phongikaroon, Nuclear Engineering Program Director at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Bob Shippee, VA Chapter Legislative Chair, and Glen Besa, FOJG ExCom Member and Political Chair, will present. FOJG Program—Nuclear Power and the Climate Crisis: Solution or Distraction? (www.sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james)

January 12, 2025 | 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

FOJG Program—Richmond Office of Sustainability Updates with Laura Thomas, Director of Sustainability.

Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220

The Office of Sustainability (OOS) is a team of dynamic, cross-functional specialists who accelerate the advancement of climate justice in the City of Richmond through the implementation of RVAgreen 2050. The Office of Sustainability recognizes that change happens when we meet others where they are. OOS's vision is that all Richmonders, regardless of their identity or neighborhood, thrive in a climate-resilient and climate neutral community. While our mission is to serve as the central hub of equitable climate action and resilience, in order to achieve our vision and mission, we strive to provide all services in a manner that is inclusive, respectful, transparent, and collaborative—every time. FOJG Program—Richmond Office of Sustainability Updates (www.sierraclub.org/virginia/falls-james)

