

January 2023 Newsletter

Falls of the James Group



Cardinal on an icy branch. Photo courtesy of Andrew Peacock.

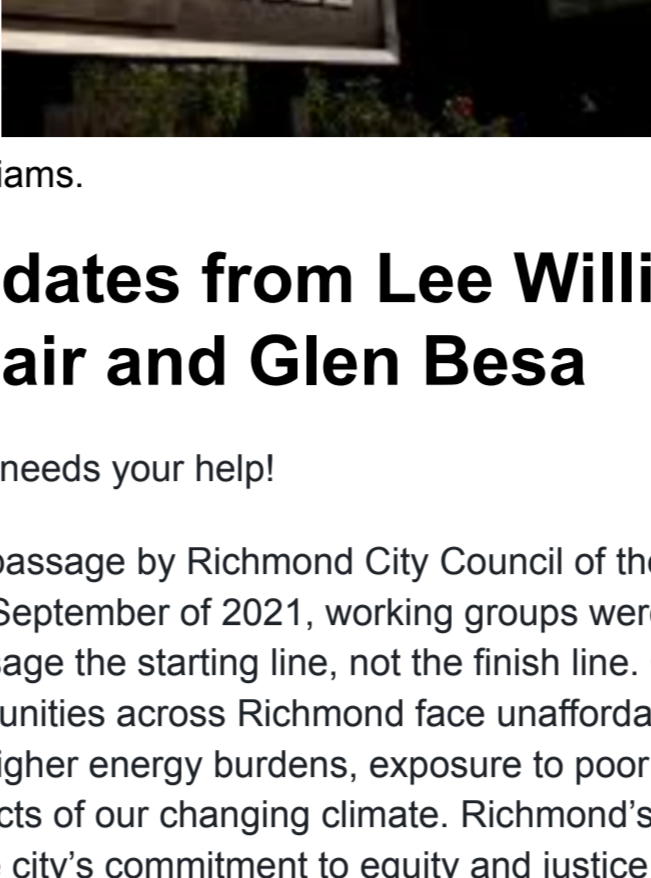


Photo courtesy of Lee Williams.

Advocacy Updates from Lee Williams, FOJG Advocacy Chair and Glen Besa

The Advocacy Committee needs your help!

Following the unanimous passage by Richmond City Council of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Resolution in September of 2021, working groups were created in an effort to make the resolution's passage the starting line, not the finish line. Our health - and our climate - can't wait. Communities across Richmond face unaffordable energy and housing costs, disproportionately higher energy burdens, exposure to poor indoor and outdoor air quality and the worst impacts of our changing climate. Richmond's FY2024 budget is an opportunity to advance the city's commitment to equity and justice by upholding the vision of the resolution. Climate action must be a priority, as the budget is a significant opportunity to take meaningful steps to reduce emissions, mitigate heat island effects, and offer equitable and transformative solutions in four key areas where investment is critically needed, especially in historically underserved neighborhoods.

- **Housing:** Affordability, living conditions, tenant rights, weatherization, renewable energy and efficiency, electrification, and reducing energy burden.
- **Infrastructure:** Invest in healthy streets, green spaces, and parks, expand sidewalks and increase safety and access for pedestrians and transit users, and protected bike lanes for scooter and bike users.
- **Transportation:** Improve access to public transit by increasing routes and frequency.
- **Economic Development:** Build grocery stores in Richmond neighborhoods that lack healthy food access, create new green jobs and incentives for real estate developers to electrify their utilities and appliances, and utilize/repent solar.

Falls of the James Group members have been volunteering their time and talents alongside other locally based organizations this past year to prepare these Policy and Budget Recommendations. Everyone who lives within the City of Richmond should have received an action alert that would send a letter directly to their city council representative and the mayor. If you missed it, you can access the action alert here: <https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/Virginia?actionId=AR0373559>

Tell Richmond decision-makers to prioritize a budget that supports cross-sector solutions that protect the health and safety of ALL our communities. You can see the full list of recommendations, as well as the list of supporting organizations at: [vasierra.club/FY2024budgetrecs](https://www.sierraclub.org/va/falls-of-the-james-2024-budget).

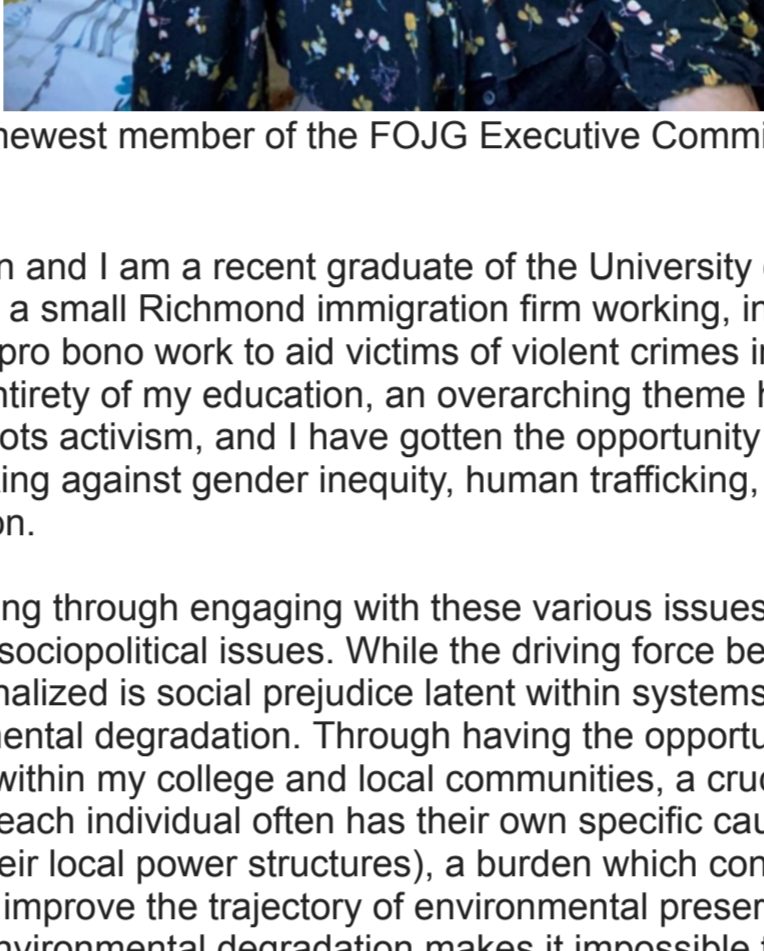
To get involved with the advocacy committee, email Lee Williams at Lee.SierraClub.GreenNewDealVA@gmail.com. We will need more members to get involved in advocacy work. If we want to see changes to "business as usual" from city council and surrounding counties board of supervisors in the New Year! Join us!

First Fridays Climate Rallies at the Capital Bell Tower

The coming General Assembly Session starting in January will include other attacks by Youngkin and Republicans on Virginia Climate protections such as repeal of Virginia Clean Cars legislation and weakening of the Virginia Clean Economy Act standards for renewable energy. **Join our rally for a Livable Future at the Bell Tower on Capital Square on Jan 13th at 12 noon.** Demonstrate public support for climate justice initiatives and find out how we will defeat Governor Youngkin's attacks on Virginia's climate progress. Hear from allied organizations and legislative friends about what you can do.

Check out <https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/events-calendar> and our [Falls of the James Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages for updates.

Welcome our New and Continuing FOJG Executive Committee Members for the 2023-2025 Term

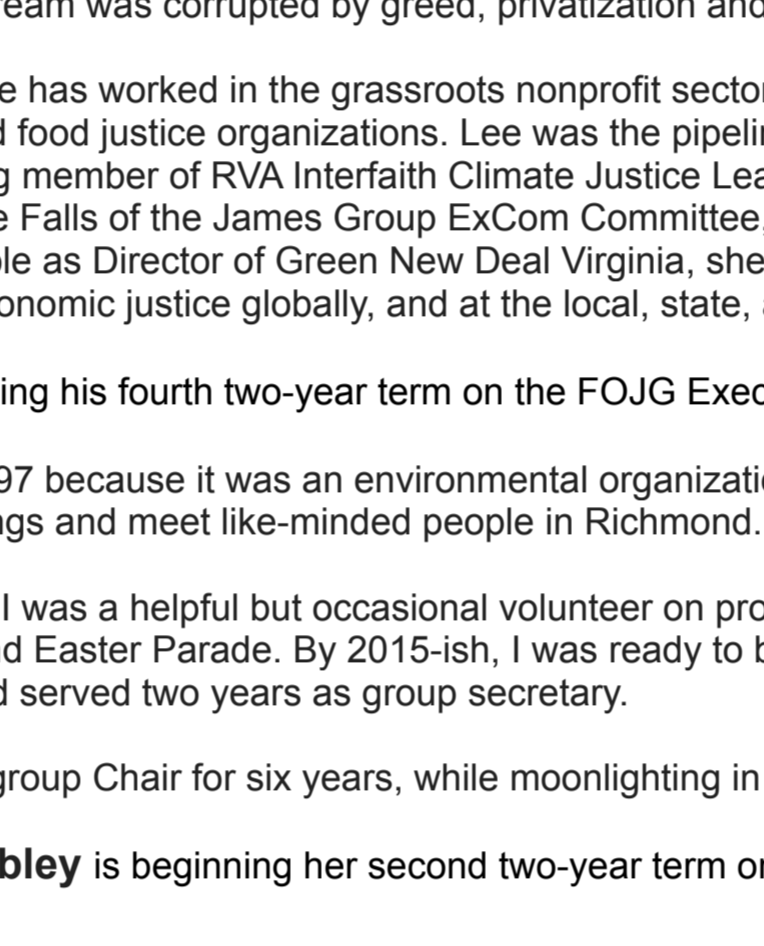


Olivia Jurcisin is our newest member of the FOJG Executive Committee. Photo courtesy of Olivia Jurcisin.

My name is Olivia Jurcisin and I am a recent graduate of the University of Richmond, now working as a paralegal at a small Richmond immigration firm working, in a range of areas from family-based petitions to border work to aid victims of violent crimes in the United States gain status. Throughout the entirety of my education, an overarching theme has been community engagement and grassroots activism, and I have gotten the opportunity to become engrossed in advocacy for issues working against gender inequity, human trafficking, xenophobia, racism, and environmental degradation.

A critical part of my learning through engaging with these various issues is the truly interconnected nature of sociopolitical issues. While the driving force behind Women globally being systematically marginalized is social prejudice latent within systems of power, this is exacerbated by environmental degradation. Through having the opportunity to be surrounded by so many young leaders at community colleges such as Shalom Farms and Bellemeade Park, through is that, although each individual often has their own specific cause (such as fighting systemic racism within their local power structures), a burden which constantly hangs over our heads is the dire need to improve the trajectory of environmental preservation. The inherent intersectional nature of environmental degradation makes it impossible to sit idly by while every aspect of modern life is impacted by human environmental exploitation.

I am elated to have the opportunity to work alongside the members of the Sierra Club Falls of the James Group as an ExCom member, and I will do everything I can to contribute to the success of this organization and our local ecosystem as well!



Lee Anne Williams is beginning her second two-year term on the FOJG Executive Committee and as the FOJG Advocacy Committee Chair. Photo courtesy of Lee Williams.

Lee's background is in healthcare, and she worked as a CCRN before moving to Richmond Virginia to raise her 3 children. Over the years, she watched ecosystems degrade, extreme weather and fires worsen, and the promises made at that first Earth Day be forgotten and cast aside as the American Dream was corrupted by greed, privatization and union busting.

For the past 20 years, she has worked in the grassroots nonprofit sector in a variety of roles for environmental, social and food justice organizations. Lee was the pipeline legislative chair for the Chapter and is a founding member of RVA Interfaith Climate Justice League and Divest RVA and is currently serving on the Falls of the James Group Ex-Com Committee, and as the group's Advocacy Chair. In her role as Director of Green New Deal Virginia, she is committed to the fight for environmental and economic justice globally, and at the local, state, and federal level.

Joe Brancoli is beginning his fourth two-year term on the FOJG Executive Committee.

I joined Sierra Club in 1997 because it was an environmental organization with a local presence. I desired to attend meetings and meet like-minded people in Richmond.

For almost twenty years, I was a helpful but occasional volunteer on projects like the holiday auction, Big Yard Sale and Easter Parade. By 2015-ish, I was ready to become more involved, so I ran for Ex-Com and served two years as group secretary.

Since then, I have been group Chair for six years, while moonlighting in 2021 as Chapter Chair.

Carille Greenberg Ribley is beginning her second two-year term on the FOJG Executive Committee.

In 2009, I invited some friends over for dinner and they showed me Chasing Extinction, an environmental film which, as a former TV producer/writer and PBS staffer, had a profound impact on me. I wanted others to experience the film so I arranged a showing at my church where I met other Sierras who managed the RVA Environmental Film Festival. The Festival needed volunteers to handle promotion, build donor relationships, and manage the website - great matches for my corporate communications skill set. So in I dove! Now a grant writer, I have served one term on the Executive Committee and hope I can continue to learn more and more about environmental advocacy in the future!

Carille also serves on the FOJG Membership Engagement Committee and has worked to connect with young environmentalists, such as coordinating with University of Richmond students to present their research projects and environmental advocacy efforts.



Aileen Rivera is beginning her second two-year term on the FOJG Executive Committee. Photo Courtesy of Aileen Rivera.

Born in New York City and raised in Puerto Rico, I've been a resident of Virginia since 1985. I studied Biology at VA Tech where I found the support and atmosphere to develop the skills that empowered my interest in protecting nature and social justice. The majority of my family is still in Puerto Rico. I'm a Spanish Interpreter for an Early Intervention program and have volunteered in many community organizations throughout the years, including Fulton Hill Neighborhood Resource Center, Alliance for Chesapeake Bay, Virginia Defenders, and World Pediatric Project, to name a few. Currently, I am a member of Keep Henrico Beautiful and Route 5 Corridor Coalition. I joined the FOJG Sierra club officially 2 years ago. I have been a long time Sierra Club member and supported their advocacy efforts throughout the years but never as an official member.

I've been an environmentalist, social activist and peacemaker my whole adult life. I'm passionate about conservation, preservation and sustainability. I enjoy lending a hand wherever needed to help make our part of the world a safer and healthier place and enjoy meeting great activists from all over the country.

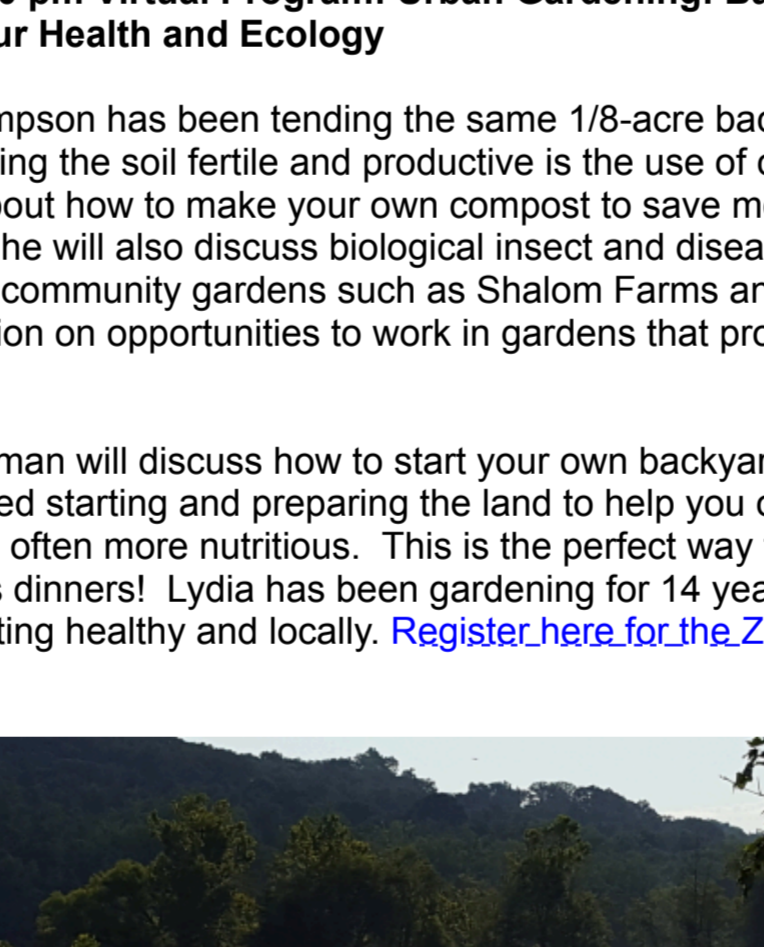
Register for our FOJG Outings and Programs



Maymont in winter. Photo Courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

01/23 10 am - 12:30 pm Walk through Maymont with Ralph Grove. Maymont is a 100-acre historic estate and park, located along the James River in Richmond. We'll take a walk through the grounds, seeing the historic buildings and gardens, and the Maymont mansion. Total walking distance will be about three miles. The path is paved or graveled, with some hills to negotiate. [Register here.](#)

1/13/23 12 pm - Rally for a Livable Future at the Bell Tower on Capital Square. This is part of the First Fridays Climate Emergency Rallies at the Capital.



1/13/23 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm Virtual Program: Urban Gardening: Backyard and Community Growing Our Health and Ecology

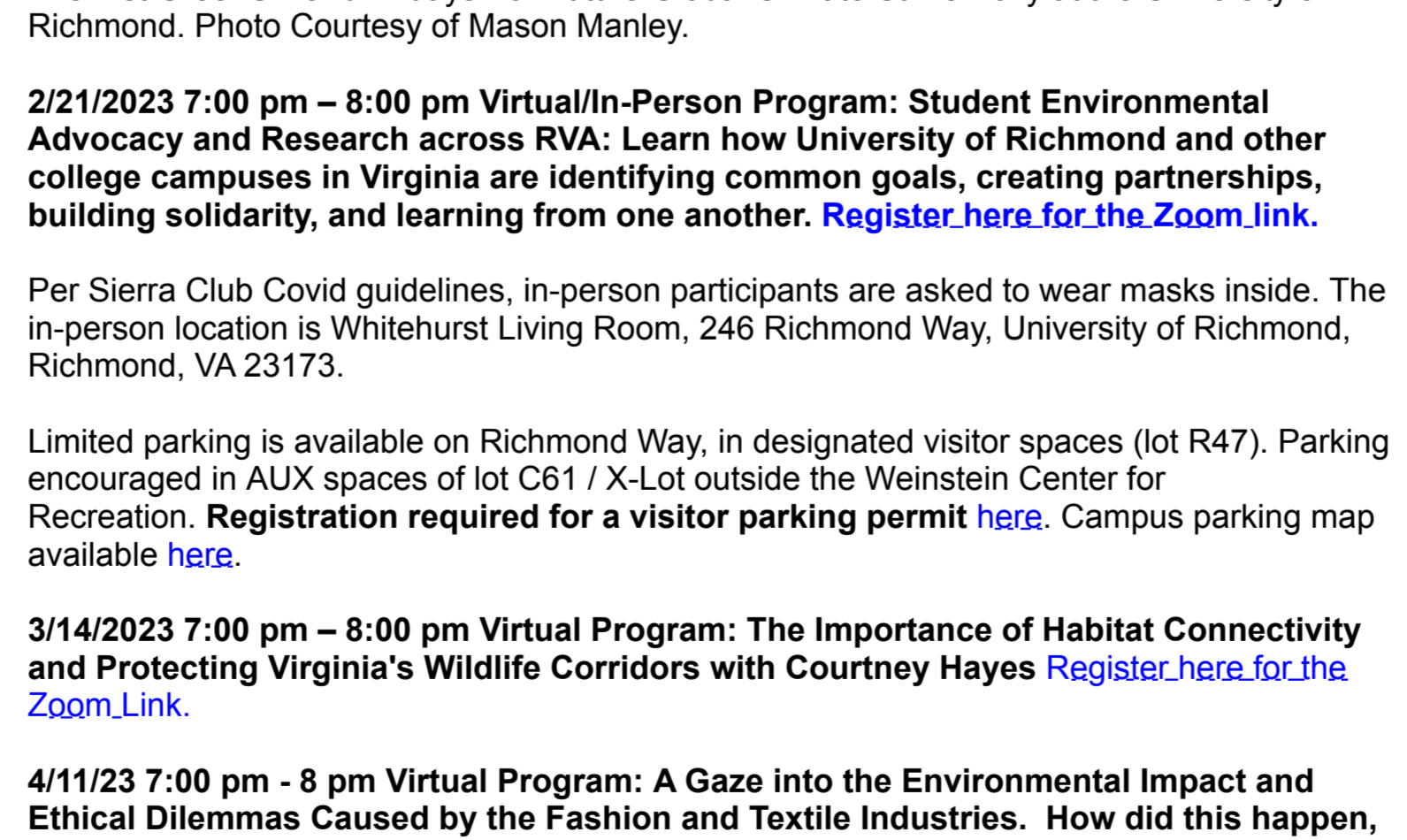
FOJG member Lisa Thompson has been tending the same 1/8-acre backyard vegetable garden for 24 years. Key to keeping the soil fertile and productive is the use of compost and organic additives. Lisa will talk about how to make your own compost to save money and reduce what you send to the landfill. She will also discuss biological insect and disease control. As a regular volunteer at community gardens such as Shalom Farms and Bellemeade Park, Lisa will also present information on opportunities to work in gardens that produce food for the community.

FOJG member Lydia Pittman will discuss how to start your own backyard garden: it's cheap and easy. She will discuss seed starting and preparing the land to help you on your journey to food that's less expensive and often more nutritious. This is the perfect way to pinch a few pennies and enjoy some delicious dinners! Lydia has been gardening for 14 years in urban and rural settings with a goal of eating healthy and locally. [Register here for the Zoom link.](#)



Pony Pasture Rapids. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

2/12/2022 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm FOJG Hike in Richmond: Pony Pasture Rapids Park along the James River with Shavon Peacock. [Register here.](#)



The first GreenUR and Fridays For Future Global Climate Strike Rally at the University of Richmond. Photo Courtesy of Mason Manley.

2/21/2023 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm Virtual/In-Person Program: Student Environmental Advocacy and Research across RVA: Learn how University of Richmond and other college campuses in Virginia are identifying common goals, creating partnerships, building solidarity, and learning from one another. [Register here for the Zoom link.](#)

Per Sierra Club Covid guidelines, in-person participants are asked to wear masks inside. The in-person location is Whitehurst Living Room, 246 Richmond Way, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.

Limited parking is available on Richmond Way, in designated visitor spaces (lot R47). Parking encouraged in AUX spaces of lot C61 / X-Lot outside the Weinstein Center for Recreation. [Registration required for a visitor parking permit here.](#) Campus parking map available [here.](#)

3/14/2023 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm Virtual Program: The Importance of Habitat Connectivity and Protecting Virginia's Wildlife Corridors with Courtney Hayes [Register here for the Zoom Link.](#)

4/11/23 7:00 pm - 8 pm Virtual Program: A Gaze into the Environmental Impact and Ethical Dilemmas Caused by the Fashion and Textile Industries. How did this happen, what has occurred, can we change? presented by Karl Green. [Register here for the Zoom link.](#)

Check out the [FOJG Calendar](#) for more environmental events in the Richmond area. Also check out the [Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Calendar](#) for Sierra Club events around the state.

Missed our 12/13/22 FOJG Program on Adventures in Turkey, Germany and the Hartz Mountains and Newfoundland: Hiking the Lycean Way in Turkey, Traveling in the Hartz Mountains and the Romanesque Road in Germany, and Camping and Paddling the Natural Wonders of Newfoundland? Go [here](#) to see the recording of this program.

Join the Sierra Club!

Not a member of the Sierra Club yet? You can join the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization in the nation for as little as \$15. [Join Today and Help Fight Climate Change and Environmental Justice!](#) If you want to give a gift membership, go [here!](#)

How the Sierra Club Does it!

Since 1892, we know actions speak louder than words. That's why we've built a national community of volunteers, advocates, and grassroots activists who show up when and where it counts. Our supporters have the tools and resources to make themselves heard in nearly every district in every state across the country. From securing protection for 439 parks and monuments, to winning passage of the Clean Air and Endangered Species Acts, to putting over 281 coal plants on the path to replacement with clean energy, to securing the right of every kid in America to visit a national park, we have an unmatched record of success and impact.

Explore, enjoy and protect the planet.

Thank you!

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2023 Executive Committee Contacts

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