

March 2024 Newsletter

Falls of the James Group



Backyard squirrel finishing off Andrew's apple. Photo courtesy of Andrew Peacock.

March 12th FOJG Program

Think Beyond Methane: The Plan to Transition Richmond Gasworks to a Renewable Energy Provider

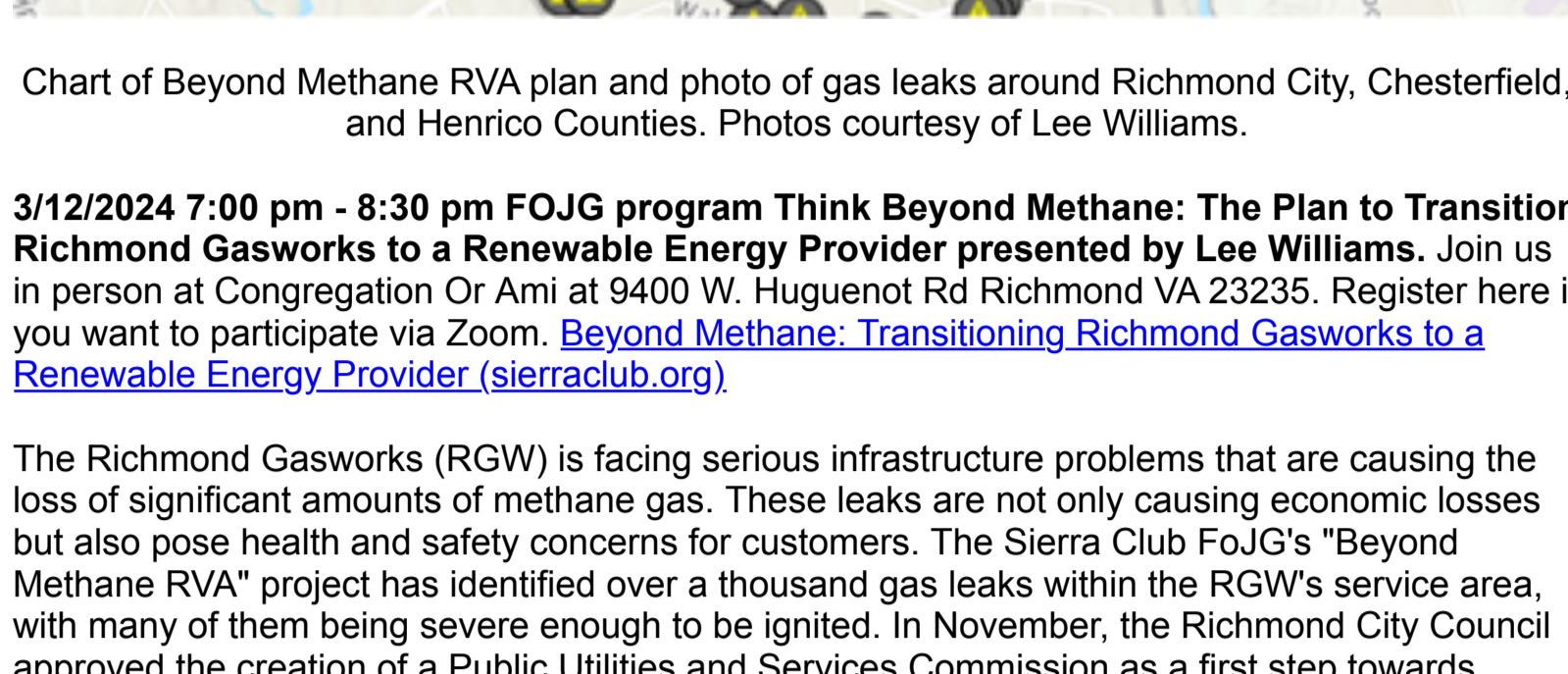
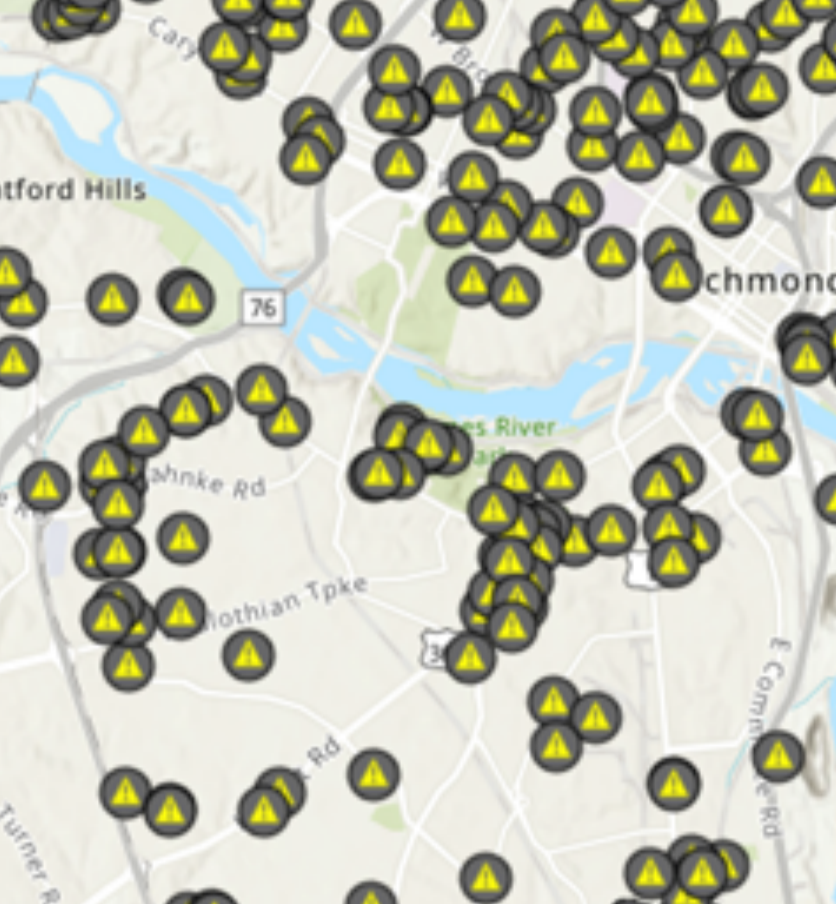


Chart of Beyond Methane RVA plan and photo of gas leaks around Richmond City, Chesterfield, and Henrico Counties. Photos courtesy of Lee Williams.

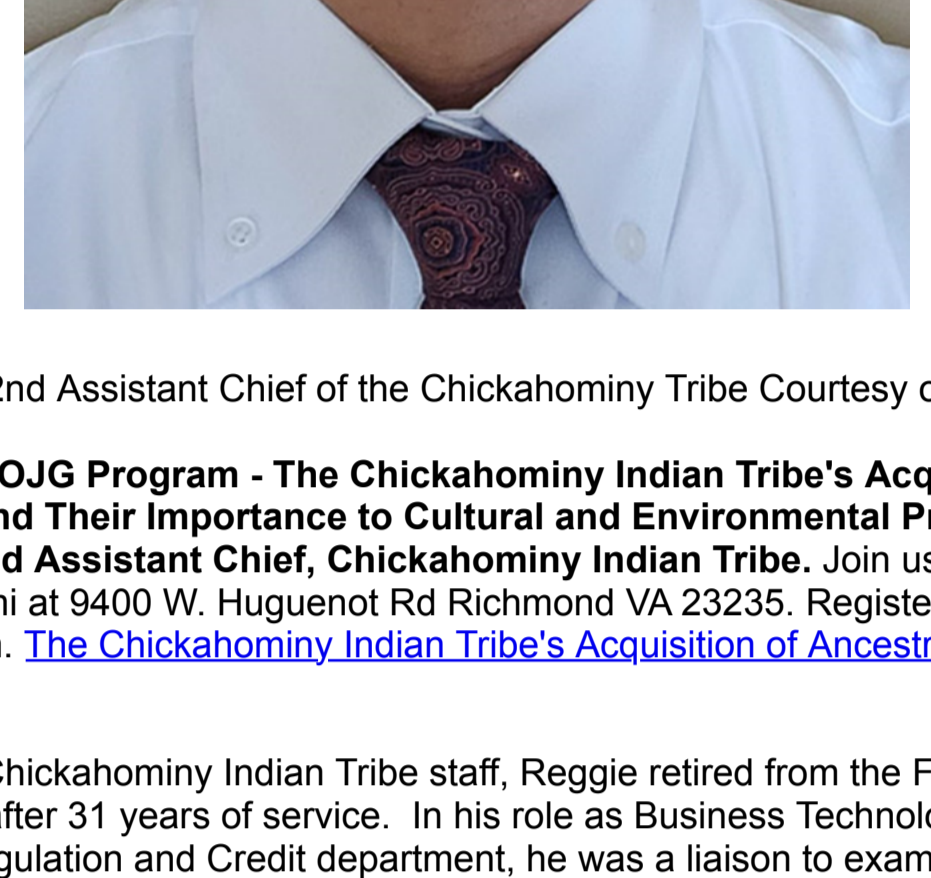
3/12/2024 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm FOJG program Think Beyond Methane: The Plan to Transition Richmond Gasworks to a Renewable Energy Provider presented by Lee Williams. Join us in person at Congregation Or Ami at 9400 W. Huguenot Rd Richmond VA 23235. Register here if you want to participate via Zoom. [Beyond Methane: Transitioning Richmond Gasworks to a Renewable Energy Provider](#) ([sierraclub.org](#))

The Richmond Gasworks (RGW) is facing serious infrastructure problems that are causing the loss of significant amounts of methane gas. These leaks are not only causing economic losses but also pose health and safety concerns for customers. The Sierra Club FOJG's "Beyond Methane RVA" project has identified over a thousand gas leaks within the RGW's service area, with many of them being severe enough to be ignited. In November, the Richmond City Council approved the creation of a Public Utilities and Services Commission as a first step towards transitioning away from gas in accordance with the city's master plan and 2021's climate and ecological emergency resolution. Now, the question is, what does the next decade look like for an old city that has accepted the challenge of being a renewable energy provider?

Lee Williams is a Sierra Club Falls of the James Group (FOJG) Executive Committee member and FOJG Advocacy Committee chair. Additionally, Lee is one of the leaders of the FOJG initiated Electrify RVA campaign, which then developed the Beyond Methane RVA group. [Home - Beyond Methane RVA](#) Lee is also co-director of the Green New Deal Virginia.

April 9th FOJG Program

The Chickahominy Indian Tribe's Acquisition of Ancestral Lands and Their Importance to Cultural and Environmental Preservation



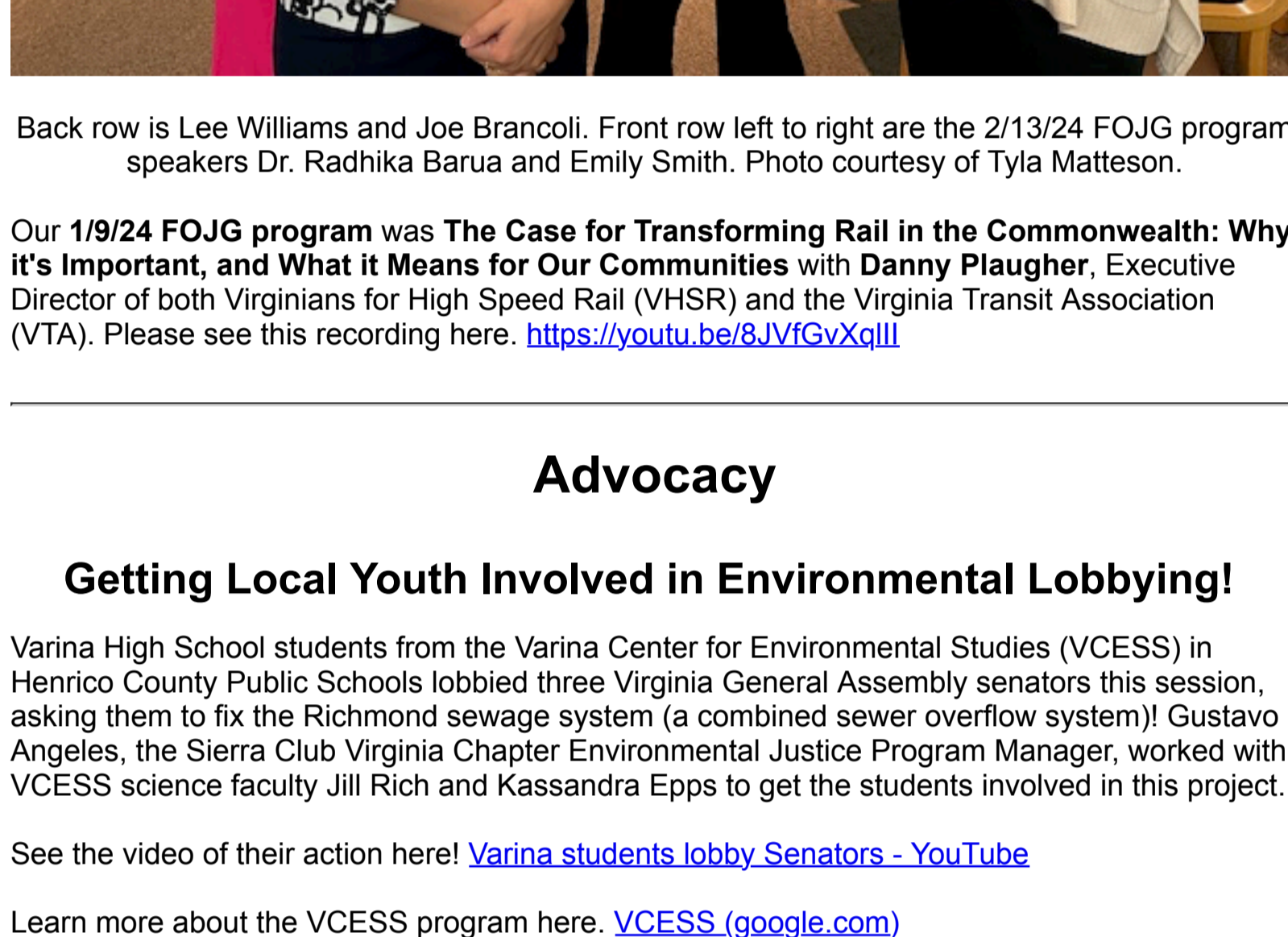
Reggie Stewart, 2nd Assistant Chief of the Chickahominy Tribe Courtesy of Reggie Stewart.

4/9/24 7:00 - 8:30 FOJG Program - The Chickahominy Indian Tribe's Acquisition of Ancestral Lands and Their Importance to Cultural and Environmental Preservation with Reggie Stewart, 2nd Assistant Chief, Chickahominy Indian Tribe. Join us in person at Congregation Or Ami at 9400 W. Huguenot Rd Richmond VA 23235. Register here if you want to participate via Zoom. [The Chickahominy Indian Tribe's Acquisition of Ancestral Lands](#) ([sierraclub.org](#))

Prior to joining the Chickahominy Indian Tribe staff, Reggie retired from the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond after 31 years of service. In his role as Business Technology Consultant in the Supervision, Regulation and Credit department, he was a liaison to examination staff in assisting with the use of automated systems and databases, provided MIS reporting from various data sources, provided help desk support for end-users, identified emerging technology to assist examiners in performing their job, managed IT related projects, and provided information security services for the department.

Currently, Reggie serves as IT Director and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Manager for the Tribe. In his role as IT Director, he provides end-user support for Tribal staff, purchases and deploys IT equipment, manages IT projects, monitors data integrity within IT software solutions, and develops and enforces information security policies. Reggie has been a member of the Tribal Council since June 2004 and has served as 2nd Assistant Chief since June 2011. In addition, Reggie served as Chair of the Virginia Indian Advisory Council (VIAC) for the Jamestown 2007 Commemoration. The Council was responsible for the planning and execution of all the Virginia Indian related events during the year.

Our 2/13/24 FOJG program on **The Circular Economy: Do We Have the Skills?™** with **Dr. Radhika Barua and Emily Smith** of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)? Please view the recording of this program here: <https://youtu.be/BnkeHFf08E>



Back row is Lee Williams and Joe Brancoli. Front row left to right are the 2/13/24 FOJG program speakers Dr. Radhika Barua and Emily Smith. Photo courtesy of Tyla Matteson.

Our 1/9/24 FOJG program was **The Case for Transforming Rail in the Commonwealth: Why It's Important, and What it Means for Our Communities** with **Danny Plaughter**, Executive Director of both Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR) and the Virginia Transit Association (VTA). Please see this recording here: <https://youtu.be/8UJGvXkall>

Advocacy

Getting Local Youth Involved in Environmental Lobbying!

Varina High School students from the Varina Center for Environmental Studies (VCESS) in Henrico County Public Schools lobbied three Virginia General Assembly senators this session, asking them to fix the Richmond sewage system (a combined sewer overflow system) Gustavo Angeles, the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter Environmental Justice Program Manager, worked with VCESS the science faculty Jill Rich and Kassandra Epps to get the students involved in this project.

See the video of their action here! [Varina students lobby Senators - YouTube](#)

Learn more about the VCESS program here. [VCESS \(google.com\)](#)

Demand Strong Health Protections

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." As a nurse who has seen firsthand the importance of taking care of our health, and a grandmother who wants nothing but the best for her grandchildren, I couldn't agree more. It's always wiser to prevent harm and preserve our health rather than try to restore it. But what do we do when we're unaware and helpless against an invisible threat that's in the air we breathe? We educate and regulate to combat them!

Did you know that sterilization facilities in Richmond emit a highly toxic chemical into the air called **ethylene oxide (EtO)**? It's appalling how this harmful substance can affect the health of people living, working and playing near these facilities. EtO is a colorless gas used to sterilize medical equipment, spices, and plastics. Experts at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have determined that EtO-contaminated air from factories and hospitals causes skin, eye and lung irritation, and long-term exposure is linked to reproductive problems and **multiple cancers**, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, and breast cancer.

Virginia has four commercial sterilizers, two in Henrico County and two in Virginia Beach. Sterilization Services of Virginia (SSV) and Central Virginia Health Network/Bon Secours Mercy Health facilities operate less than 10 miles apart in Henrico County. Elevated cancer risks have been identified by the EPA from the Sterilization Services of Virginia (SSV) facility specifically, posing a threat to nearly 100 schools and childcare centers, and around 100,000 people within a five-mile radius of its facility. Sterilization Services of Virginia (SSV) is currently releasing nine times more Ethylene Oxide (EtO) than acceptable levels from its location near Charles City Road. SSV uses EtO to clean medical equipment like catheters and stents which are too delicate to be cleaned using heat.

Hazard EtO is alternately used to sterilize medical equipment in the US, there are now less hazardous alternatives available to the industry that won't pose health risks to workers and our communities.

Last year, the EPA proposed updates to standards for commercial sterilizers which would require stricter emissions controls for ethylene oxide. Without proper rules, vulnerable communities will continue to be exposed to this cancer-causing chemical. Sterilization can be done safely, without harming workers and the surrounding communities. The EPA's final rule will be released in March. We must urge policymakers to consider the health costs to workers and communities and finalize this rule with the strongest safeguards possible. I am urging the Biden Administration to release the most health-protective final rule, and I ask you to do the same. Please contact the **White House**, the **EPA**, **Senator Tim Kaine**, **Senator Mark Warner**, and your Representative in Congress, and demand strong health protections for our communities. Let's work together to ensure that our neighbors receive the safeguards they deserve.

Lee Williams has worked as a critical care nurse and in the community for 36 years. Lee is currently using her skills to champion pathways to a just energy transition and to protect our shared air, land and water quality as a member of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments. Lee is also Advocacy Committee Chair for FOJG and an FOJG Executive Committee member.

Upcoming Sierra Club Hikes

Hiking 101 Series

Hiking 101 outings are open to anyone but are geared toward novice hikers and those who are "hiking curious". These outdoor adventures take place in the Greater Richmond area, can be completed in under 90 minutes, and don't require any hiking gear. Each outing begins with a short discussion of hiking basics before we hit the trail. Hiking 101 outings provide a friendly and supportive environment for those eager to explore the great outdoors, one step at a time. Join these outings to experience the wonders of nature, meet other hikers, and build your confidence on and off the trail. Doug Couvillion - FOJG Outings Leader.

Sierra Club FOJG Meetup Group

In order to share our Sierra Club outings and introduce more people to the Sierra Club, FOJG now has a Meetup group. Our hikes and programs will be advertised on Meetup in addition to our FOJG electronic calendar. Ralph Grove, Doug Couvillion and Shavon Peacock are the MeetUp group leaders.

Join our group and be one of the first to hear about our upcoming hikes. These events fill up fast so be sure to register at Meetup or on the calendar link for the outing to get a spot before the capacity limit is reached. [Sierra Club - Falls of the James Group | Meetup](#). We already have 70 Meetup members.

You can check out other local free virtual and in-person events at the FOJG calendar here [Events/Calendar | Sierra Club](#)

To see what free virtual and in-person Sierra Club events you can attend throughout the state, check out the Virginia Chapter Sierra Club calendar here [Events/Calendar | Sierra Club](#)



Piliated Woodpecker in the Pony Pasture Rapids Park. Photo Courtesy of Doug Couvillion.

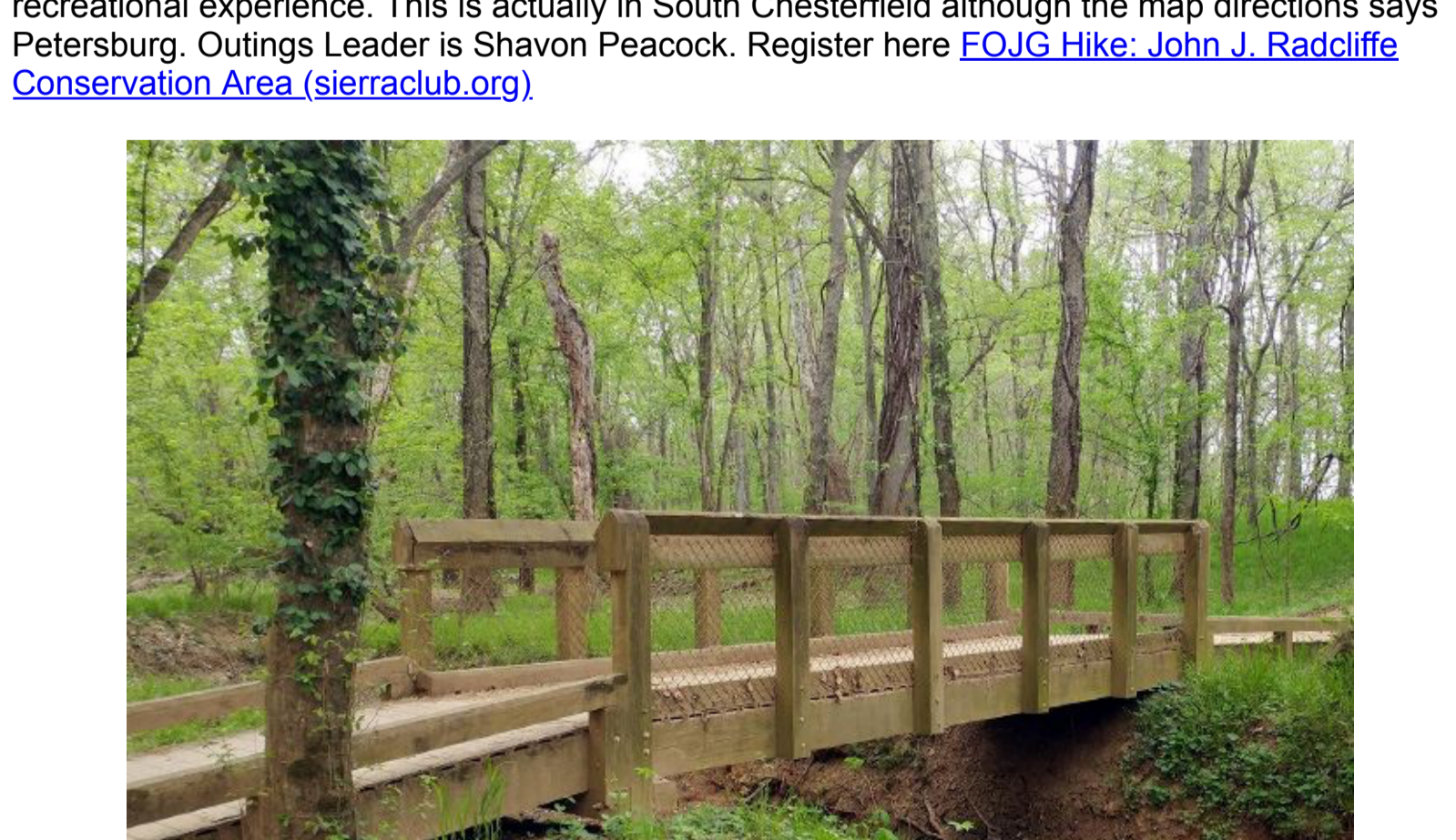
3/10/24 FOJG Hiking 101 at Pony Pasture 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM This one is at capacity but if anyone wants to get on the wait list, they can contact Doug Couvillion at doug.couvillion@zohomail.com

After our introductory discussion, we'll explore a flat, 2-mile circuit to The Wetlands Park and back. The route takes us along the river, to an open meadow, through wetlands, and back through the forest with plenty of opportunities to see wildlife.



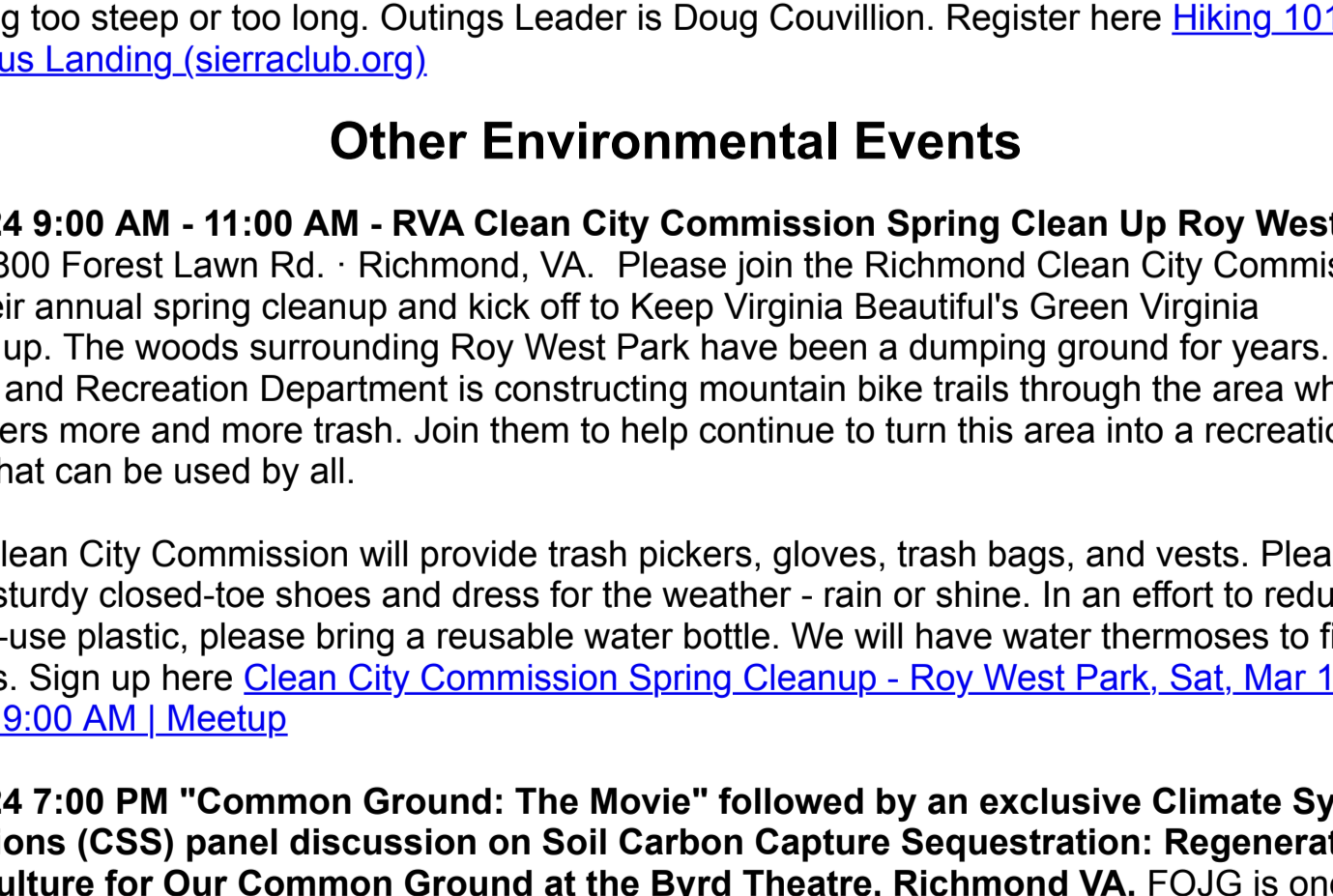
Beaver Lake at Pocahontas State Park. Photo Courtesy of Ralph Grove.

3/30/24 - 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM FOJG Hike at Beaver Lake at Pocahontas State Park This hike will cover the Beaver Lake trail and part of the Ground Pine trail at Pocahontas State Park. The trails go around Beaver Lake, through woods and over hills, with views of the lake. The hike is easy to moderate, with a few hills. Total hiking distance will be about 3.5 miles, total time about 2.5 hours. Afterwards, we can have a picnic lunch, weather permitting, and/or visit the Civilian Conservation Corps museum, which is located at the trailhead. Event Organizer: Ralph Grove (rgrove@icloud.com) (540) 478-3677 Register here. [Hike at Beaver Lake, Pocahontas S.P.](#) ([sierraclub.org](#))



The Appomattox River and Brasfield Dam at John J. Radcliffe Conservation Area. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

4/7/24 10 AM - 12 PM. FOJG Hike at John J. Radcliffe Conservation Area We will hike a 1.5 mile loop trail along the Appomattox River and through a marsh and upland area. The hike will take 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Located just below the Brasfield Dam and Appomattox River Waters Authority, the Appomattox River Canoe Launch provides a parking area and boat slips for small non-powered craft. This location also serves as the trailhead for the John J. Radcliffe Conservation Area, which consists of 97 acres of woodlands and swampland along the Appomattox River. Wildlife is in abundance in this diverse environment, and 1.5 miles of trail and over 500 feet of elevated boardwalk through the property provide visitors with a unique recreational experience. This is actually in South Chesterfield although the map directions says Petersburg. Outings Leader is Shavon Peacock. Register here [FOJG Hike, John J. Radcliffe Conservation Area](#) ([sierraclub.org](#))



Robious Landing Park bridge. Photo courtesy of Doug Couvillion.

4/13/24 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM FOJG Hiking 101 at Robious Landing. This 2-mile hike roughly follows the perimeter of Robious Landing Park. We begin our hike along the South bank of the James River before turning inland and hiking through new growth forest. Our route is mostly wooded and passes a meadow or two before returning to the river. This hike has a few hills but nothing too steep or too long. Outings Leader is Doug Couvillion. Register here [Hiking 101: Robious Landing](#) ([sierraclub.org](#))

Other Environmental Events

3/16/24 9:00 AM - 11:00 AM - RVA Clean City Commission Spring Clean Up Roy West Park 800 Forest Lawn Rd - Richmond, VA. Please join the Richmond Clean City Commission for their annual spring cleanup and kick off to Keep Virginia Beautiful's Green Virginia Greenup. The woods surrounding Roy West Park have been a dumping ground for years. RVA Parks and Recreation Department is constructing mountain bike trails through the area which uncovers more and more trash. Join them to help continue to turn this area into a recreational area that can be used by all.

The Clean City Commission will provide trash pickers, gloves, trash bags, and vests. Please wear sturdy closed-toe shoes and dress for the weather - rain or shine. In an effort to reduce single-use plastic, please bring a reusable water bottle. We will have water thermoses to fill your bottles. Sign up here [Clean City Commission Spring Cleanup - Roy West Park, Sat, Mar 16, 2024, 9:00 AM | Meetup](#)

3/19/24 7:00 PM "Common Ground: The Movie" followed by an exclusive **Climate Systems Solutions (CSS) panel discussion on Soil Carbon Capture Sequestration: Regenerative Agriculture for Our Common Ground** at the Byrd Theatre, Richmond VA. FOJG is one of the sponsors. Tickets are \$20. More information and tickets can be found at this link [Common Ground Event - Climate Systems Solutions](#) ([climatesystemsolutions.org](#))

Check out more environmental events on our FOJG Facebook page thanks to FOJG member Daryl Downing's frequent sharing of environmental events! (3) [Sierra Club - Falls of the James | Facebook](#)

Join the Sierra Club

If you are not a member and are interested in joining the oldest, largest grassroots environmental organization in the country, you can join for as little as \$15 here. [Join Today, Become a Champion](#) ([sierraclub.org](#)) Once you join the national Sierra Club, you are automatically a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Falls of the James Group Sierra Club.

Add your voice to the hundreds of thousands of Americans committed to leaving our children a living legacy — clean air, safe drinking water, and natural grandeur. From Yosemite National Park to the Grand Canyon, since 1892 the Sierra Club has been instrumental in preserving nature's most splendid wild places. Thank You!

Shavon Peacock
Sierra Club Falls of the James Group
Membership Engagement Committee Chair, Outings Leader, and Newsletter Editor

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