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SIERRA CLUB

Rappahannock Group of the Sierra Club

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July-September 2021 Newsletter

Memo from the Chair

By Bill Johnson

Chemical Conversion (“advanced recycling”)

In 2021, the Virginia legislature passed a so called “advance recycling” piece of legislation, backed by the American Chemical Council and fossil fuel industry. It has been enacted in 13 states, with a goal of having it enacted everywhere. Projections have been made that as many as 5 such plants will be built in Virginia. It is uncertain how they will be regulated, but it is certain that they will result in air pollution, huge amounts of toxic ash, and health problems for residents living near the plants. We need to fight this, or we could see these super polluting plants everywhere. The legislation changed the regulations that govern these plants from waste management to manufacturing, to escape the requirements to perform significant checks against the release of air, water, and land pollutants that these plants will release.

Per a report that Kayli Ottomanelli produced for RGSC, the US has only 3 such plants in operation, and there are almost none worldwide that actually recycle the processed plastics into new plastic. Two of the three in the US simply convert plastics to fuel (PTF). Only 1 (Agilyx, in Tigard, Oregon) converts any into plastic. All of these plants melt the plastic to generate gases, liquid fuel, and toxic waste. “In 2019 alone, the global production and incineration of plastic accounted for more than 850 million metric tons of greenhouse gases released to the atmosphere, roughly equivalent to the emissions of 189 coal power plants. With incineration being the primary source of greenhouse gas emissions in the management of plastic waste, plastic disposal PTF facilities are not the solution to our plastic problem.” Much of the fuel is burned in cement kilns, where there are far less environmental regulations when burned there. “Agilyx ... has a huge carbon footprint. In 2018 and 2019, for every 1 kilogram of plastic Agilyx produced, it emitted 3.23 kilograms of carbon dioxide, not including the emissions from burning the styrene itself. ... in 2018 the Agilyx facility sent over 49,000 tons of waste styrene, a highly toxic chemical, to burn in cement kilns located in low-income and people of color communities across the country”

Before proceeding with implementation of this legislation, we need to know:

- How much plastic will actually be converted into new plastic and how much will be converted into fuel for burning?
- For each plant built: What's the amount of energy used to run the plants, and how much air, water, and land pollution will it cause? What's the net amount of greenhouse gases released and what are all the toxins that will be created and how will they be disposed of? Will pipelines be needed to transport the fuels created? Will plastics be shipped into Virginia?
- Will the business be self-sustaining and profitable, or will it require funding and subsidies?

License renewal for North Anna Nuclear Power plants

Virginia Electric Power (VEPCO), a subsidiary of Dominion Energy, is attempting to have their operating license renewed with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). So far, NRC has yielded to VEPCO and is not requiring that they develop a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We believe it is needed, and are working with Beyond Nuclear and the Alliance for a Progressive Virginia. Our petition contends that Dominion's Environmental Report fails to satisfy the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or NRC regulations because it does not address the environmental impacts of operating North Anna Units 1 and 2 during the extended Subsequent License Renewal (SLR) term under the significant risk of an earthquake that exceeds what the reactors were designed for.

We have requested that NRC hold a public hearing on the application for the subsequent renewal license. We want a new, updated EIS which includes an examination of geologic risks. We want harvesting and testing of components of the North Anna reactors, and from decommissioned nuclear reactors. So far, NRC has denied our requests.

The EIS should include:

- Stringent methods to assess the condition of the aging equipment at North Anna.
- Harvesting and laboratory testing of aged materials from North Anna and parts from decommissioned reactors in the US.
- Assessing the safety of this aging plant during an earthquake.
- Assessing the ability of the earthen dam at Lake Anna to withstand a catastrophic earthquake.
- Evaluating the power plant's security and evacuation plan.
- Determining if North Anna has adequate facilities for the long term storage of nuclear waste.

We stand ready to support court battles should NRC refuse to hold hearings and make necessary changes.

Mountain Valley Pipeline – Comments Due to Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

We need to continue the fight against the polluting Mountain Valley Pipeline. It is unnecessary and costly, and Dominion is seeking to cross hundreds of streams without adequately protecting the waterways. Please send in comments to stop this atrocity. Below are instructions and the link on how to make comments on the water permit for MVP.

<https://www.deq.virginia.gov/permits-regulations/public-notices/water/wetlands-streams>

HOW TO COMMENT: All comments and requests must be in writing and be received by the Virginia DEQ by 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 27, 2021. Submittals must include the names, mailing addresses and telephone numbers of the commenter/requester and of all persons represented by the commenter/requester.

The Board also accepts oral comments at the public hearing. To make a statement at the public hearing, write your name on a sign-up sheet available before the hearing. You may sign up only for yourself. The hearing officer sets the time allowed for each statement.

Public comments relevant to the draft permit will be reviewed and considered in the development of DEQ's final recommendations for the Board's consideration.

WHERE TO SEND COMMENTS: DEQ accepts comments by hand delivery, e-mail, fax or postal mail. Mail: DEQ, P.O. Box 1105, Richmond, VA 23218; Delivery address: 1111 E. Main St, Suite 1400, Richmond, VA 23219. Email: MVP@DEQ.Virginia.gov; Fax: (804) 698-4032.

HOW A DECISION IS MADE: When a public hearing is held, the final decision is made by the State Water Control Board in accordance with the process outlined in § 62.1-44.15:02.

After public comments have been considered and addressed by the permit or other means, the State Water Control Board will make the final decision at a future Board meeting, currently being planned for December 14. Because the Board is hearing comments firsthand at the hearings, the Board will not provide an opportunity for public comment on the draft permit at its December meeting when the final action on the draft permit is considered.

The State Water Control Law does not require that there be an opportunity for public comment at the meeting when the public hearing is conducted by a quorum of the Board.

CONTACT: Steve Hardwick; Central Office, P.O. Box 1105, Richmond, VA 23218; Phone: 804-698-4168; E-mail: MVP@deq.virginia.gov; Fax: (804) 698-4178.

TALKING POINTS:

VA DEQ Talking Points for Denying Water Permit:

1. This 401 permit process does not include the 180 waterbodies MVP is attempting to bore under by requesting an amendment to the original CPCN (certificate of public convenience and necessity) from FERC.
 - a. FERC has not ruled on MVP's amendment request and DEQ is assuming that the 180 waterbodies MVP is trying to avoid with this process is going to be approved with its current draft permit.
2. The MVP pipeline has violated over 300 water quality-related standards and been fined over \$2.5M by VA and WVA AGs.
3. DEQ is rushing the process and should ask Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) for the full year to complete. DEQ originally asked ACOE for a year to complete the process because of the number of waterbodies and streams to be evaluated and reviewed and was granted 120 days, instead –
 - a. However, developments within EPA suggest that ACOE may be amenable to that request now because of the current reevaluation of Trump's 401 rule.
4. The EPA has formally suggested to ACOE the dangers posed to endangered species and water quality compromises if the water permit is granted.

5. DEQ must request detailed analyses on a crossing-by-crossing basis and for each affected waterbody to be in compliance with VA water quality standards.
6. MVP if completed and operational will have a significant impact on climate change, the most existential threat to life on the planet.
7. This permit is not in the public interest and dangerous to endangered species.

Keeping Score: VA Chapter's Legislative Scorecard

By Linda Muller, RGSC Vice Chair, and Political Chair

We've been fortunate over the past two years to have an environmentally friendly majority in the Virginia General Assembly. We have seen significant environmental legislation that supports clean air, clear water, and embraces a clean energy future for Virginia. The VA Chapter Sierra Club tracks environmental legislation in the General Assembly and creates a "score card" for each delegate and senator. The Chapter's Legislative Chair, Bob Shippee, also provides an excellent overview of the many environmental successes in the General Assembly.

See the VA Chapter Sierra Club's Legislative 2021 Scorecard at this link:

https://vasierra.club/Scorecard_2021.pdf

You can also review Legislative Scorecards from prior years at this link:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/legislative-scorecard>

VA Chapter Sierra Club PAC 2021 Endorsements

Elections matter, and elections have consequences. In Virginia, there is an election every year and this year all 100 Virginia State delegates are up for election, as well as statewide elections for Governor, Lt. Governor and Attorney General.

In **2021** the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter's political program has endorsed candidates through-out Virginia. The Sierra Club Virginia Chapter's political program is dedicated to electing clean air, clean water, and climate action champions at all levels of government. Here is the link to the PAC's endorsements:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/virginia/endorsements>

Election Day is November 2, 2021 or Early Vote Now!

Are You Registered to Vote in Virginia?

No? Register to Vote Online: (**Deadline to register is October 12, 2021**) Click the link below to register:

<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/registration/>

Yes/Not Sure? You can check your registration, request absentee ballot by mail by clicking the link below:

<https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation>

In-person absentee voting in Virginia has begun!!

September 17 and continues through Saturday, October 30.

To find out how and where to vote In-Person absentee in Virginia click the link below:

<https://www.elections.virginia.gov/casting-a-ballot/absentee-voting/>

List of local Voter Registrars Offices and Contact info:

<https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation/PublicContactLookup>

Flex Your "Green Muscle" and VOTE!

Recycling tips you may not be aware of

By Paula Chow, Programs Chair

At the Food Co-op, you can RECYCLE these specific items:



- Ballpoint pens, sharpies, mechanical pencils, plastic containing watercolor trays, empty glue sticks and their flimsy plastic wrapping (sent to Terracycle)
- Oral Care products any brand: toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes, dental floss containers (sent to Terracycle)
- Disposable razor blades and their wrapping (sent to Terracycle)
- Any clean T-shirt, any size, but free of big holes - Food Co-op volunteers turn these into reusable bags offered complimentary at the checkout
- Pill/medication bottles, cleaned, label and adhesive removed. The Stafford Lions Club sends these bottles to developing countries where they do not have access to pill bottles for their medications (they use newspaper to wrap the medications and in these hot and humid countries, the newspaper doesn't hold up affecting the durability and quality of the medications.)



Some other locations also take and recycle products:



- Dorothy Hart Community Center also collects oral care products (sent to Terracycle).
- DSW Shoe Warehouse, in Central Park Fredericksburg - any type of shoes in decent condition. (to people in need)
- Publix Grocery Store collects clean polystyrene

Some other recycling trends:

- The Fredericksburg Food Coop has a book club that just read the book “Can I Recycle This?”, by Jennie Romer. It was full of good tips for what to do.
- California is set to ban the use of the "chasing arrows" recycling symbol on things that are not actually recycled.
- Maine and Oregon shift the burden of paying for recycling from consumers to manufacturers.

I Hate Plastic Containers; But What Can I Do?

By: Diana Johnson

I love yogurt but hate the containers when I finish. I have been making my own yogurt on and off since the 1980’s. Now I make it all the time. It’s easy and I use my own glass jars. It takes about ½ hour of preparation, and another 8-12 hours sitting all by its lonesome. Then I stick it into the refrigerator.

But why stop there? I just learned how to make cultured buttermilk, sour cream, and crème fraiche. It’s simple! All without any extra machines or gadgets. I won’t be buying plastic containers anymore! 😊

I know that everyone is busy, but these small changes will save you money. The food will be fresher, and you’ll know exactly what’s in it and where it can from. It will save you time and help you save the planet. Plastic is not needed here.

All of these recipes are free and available online. If you are interested in the recipes that I use, email me and I will send you a copy.

OUTINGS REPORT

By Geoff Johnson, Outings Chair

Our Outings this summer have included a nature hike and oral history of two historic sites in the RGSC area: Stafford County's Government Island and Westmoreland County's George Washington's Birthplace.



On Saturday, July 17th, we visited Government Island in Stafford County. Ms Jane Conner provided an interesting overview of the history of the island and how it became incorporated in the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. Several years ago, she wrote a history of the Island and testified before the U. S. Congress to help make this a historical place. Ms. Conner is a member of the Stafford County Historical Society and the Stafford Museum and Cultural Center.

After the presentation we hiked the Island trails enjoying its natural beauty and the fauna. The trail is about 1 and ½ miles long with interpretive markers featuring information and photographs of the Island during various historical periods. The trail circles the Island and is easily followed, so if you have never visited this site, it is a good and simple way to enjoy a nature hike.



Our second Outing this year was on September 18th to George Washington's Birthplace in Westmoreland County. Park Ranger, Chris Kennedy gave an intriguing overview of the early Washington family and how the land was acquired and willed to the various family members. We hiked about 2 miles on the various trails around this National Park. The beauty of the trails and bridges along Popes Creek and the Dancing Marsh was amazing.

There are about six miles of trails through his park so those with an appetite for longer hikes can certainly find their enjoyment here. The park also includes a small farm, a house representing one similar to George Washington's birth house, the family burial ground, a museum and a picnic area. There is also a boat landing where kayaks and canoes can be launched. We ended the Outing with an informal gathering at the local Ingleside Winery.



Future Outing: We are planning a tour of the Spotsylvania Solar Center located near Fawn Lake later this fall. More details will be published as they become available.

If you would like to be on the email list for all future RGSC Outings, please email Geoff Johnson <geoffwithrgsc [at] gmail.com>

Innovative Project to Conserve 56 acres of Open Space in the City of Fredericksburg & Virginians Can Be a Part of It

By Paula Chow

Rappahannock Group has been working passionately to support Downtown Greens' (DTG) efforts of raising funds to purchase and conserve a parcel of land that contains living wetlands and mature trees as well as some of the last farmland in Fredericksburg. DTG is a nonprofit founded in downtown Fredericksburg with a mission to foster community involvement and growth by protecting and nurturing urban greenspace through collaborative environmental stewardship and experiential education.

As an extension of what they have been doing for over 25 years, DTG intends to purchase and use this special property to further its mission in the following three areas: **Accessible Greenspace**, creation of an **Agricultural Training Center**, and new opportunities for **Nature Based Learning**. They are currently in the land acquisition phase of the project, having signed a contract for the purchase of the property and having a goal of \$750,000 to meet by Nov. 1. They are well on their way with nearly \$325,000 in pledges and donations toward the purchase.

As the pace of development in all across the state and especially in the City of Fredericksburg is hastening, open space is becoming more critical and the need to preserve it increasingly essential to the health of communities. DTG would continue its open-access garden and green spaces for all to enjoy, with education and community mindedness at its core.

The unique parcel contains an ideal mix of mature trees, wetlands and agricultural space that is within city limits which makes it an easily accessible space for schools to participate in nature based educational opportunities. The University of Mary Washington has expressed interest in a partnership that would give students access to the land for research and educational study because of its representative biodiversity. With nearly 20 acres of wetlands, the site can become a part of the curriculum for students, helping them connect global environmental concerns with the preservation of natural resources in their immediate community. Other community schools are also interested in the access for experiential learning.

Another of DTG's goal with the agricultural portions of the site is to inspire, educate, and equip the next generation to enter the farming industry. Getting young people interested and excited to enter the agricultural field is not only essential for a healthy and equitable food system, it is essential for the health of our planet. New farmers need to be our frontline environmentalists, using regenerative and sustainable practices to grow the nation's food supply. Among minorities, the urgency of the need to train young farmers is even stronger, with the current average age of a white farmer in the United States being 59 years old, and the average age of a Black farmer being 63 (USDA's 2017 Agriculture Census).

DTG wants to be part of a growing national movement to provide resources to beginning farmers, including those of color, who are integral to the future of our nation's food security. With the support of partners and collaborators, DTG wants to develop a Training Center to teach the next generation of farmers. The establishment of this center is in collaboration with Michael Carter, Jr., 11th generation Black farmer and owner of Carter Farms, a century-old farm in Orange, Virginia (bio in *Prospectus*).

The Training Center will focus on teaching youth not only the mechanics of 'hands in the dirt' farming but also the critical components of managing a successful farm, including everything from marketing to small engine repair, writing to food safety training, irrigation and hydroponics to digital technologies. DTG wants to bring the next generation into the agriculture field in ways that they might not have known were possible or profitable. DTG hopes the city school system will use this technical training center to provide additional options to high schoolers considering their future prospects. The Gladys H. Oberle School, an alternative,

special education day school in the area has already expressed interest in offering agricultural instruction through this Training Center.

All Virginians would benefit by the preservation and eventual conservation of this property, for generations. These biodiverse 56 acres are within the Chesapeake Bay watershed fed by the Rappahannock River absorbing and filtering stormwater runoff from surrounding lands. If a development occurs on this last open space, the water quality of both the Rappahannock River and Chesapeake Bay would be negatively affected and this greenspace is gone forever. These times are filled with fights against assaults on the environment; this project is something positive leaving a legacy forever.

This project is directly in line with the Biden Administration’s 30 by 30 America the Beautiful project announced in May 2021, outlining a locally led and voluntary nationwide conservation goal to conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. “The President’s challenge is a call to action to support locally led conservation and restoration efforts of all kinds and all over America, wherever communities wish to safeguard the lands and waters they know and love,” writes Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. ([doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-outlines-america-beautiful-initiative](https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-outlines-america-beautiful-initiative))

The goal to acquire this site perfectly exemplifies Sierra Club’s mission “To Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet.”

We strongly encourage you to contribute to this exciting and ambitious project! To learn more about Downtown Greens’ once in a lifetime project go to www.downtowngreens.org/buffer. Contact Sarah Perry, Executive Director at 540-429-6771 or sarah.perry@downtowngreens.org with any questions or if you have someone we should speak with about this project.

Make your pledge today to save open greenspace for generations to come!

Tips Column

By Paula Chow

RESCUE BAGS: There are shoppers who pull out more plastic bags than they need and these end up in the cart unused. "Rescue" lingering plastic bags from the grocery carts parked at the cart station or elsewhere in the parking lot for use. The employees who are tasked with parking and gathering the carts will always pick up these bags and toss them into the trash can.

LIKE A SCOUT, ALWAYS BE PREPARED: Since the pandemic, many places including hospitals and clinics have done away with lockers. Your mammogram appointment requires you to undress from the top and store your clothing in the plastic bag they give you. I suggested to the department about letting the women know upon making their appointment that they need to bring a bag for their blouse and bra for the mammogram appointment. I even spoke to the supervisor about the suggestion as it is also a cost savings. It is easy to carry a lightweight foldable stuff-into-itself reusable bag in your purse. You will always be prepared.

SECOND USE HELPS REDUCE: At some doctor's appointments you are given a disposable paper-lined light plastic gown or top. Rather than dispose of them, I take these home and cut them into pieces to use to clean up spilled messes, bird poop on the car, and other icky stuff. THIS IS A SECOND USE RATHER THAN SINGLE USE! The same can be done with disposable pillowcases from physical therapy sessions.

BRING MORE BAGS: Always bring more reusable bags than you need into the stores. One often finds more items to purchase than originally planned.

EXTRA BAG WITHOUT WASTE: If you carefully open or cut open the wrapping from toilet tissue or other plastic wrapping which can't be recycled, you can use it as a bag for garbage or litter.

HELP YOUR LOCAL STORE: Clean bubble wrap and air pillows can be taken to your local UPS or FedEx store.

REALLY RECYCLE: Clean polystyrene trays can be recycled at Publix at multiple locations.

RGSC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EXCOM)	
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Email News Group Sign-up	rappsierragroup@gmail.com
Virginia League of Conservation Voters	www.valcv.org
Virginia Conservation Network	www.vcnva.org
Southern Environmental Law Center	www.southernenvironment.org
Friends of the Rappahannock	www.riverfriends.org
Tree Fredericksburg	www.treefredericksburg.org