



April, May, June 2020

NEWSLETTER

Serving the Residents of
Culpeper, Orange, Spotsylvania, Stafford, Fredericksburg,
Caroline, King George



MEMO FROM THE CHAIR, BILL JOHNSON

Six months ago, I was struggling to decide which aspect of the climate crisis I should focus on. Prior to that, fracking had been of particular interest to me as I learned just how dirty, unhealthy, and dangerous that process was. Counties within the Rappahannock Group's area were under siege with over 85,000 acres of farms, forests, and neighborhoods under lease to a fracking company from Texas. To get to the shale gas under the Taylorsville Basin, drillers would have to drill through the sole groundwater source for the region, the Potomac Aquifer. This would ensure that the groundwater would eventually become contaminated. Also, residents would incur significant costs to fix leaks and remediate the inevitable orphan wells. Last, they would see drillers use eminent domain to force landowners to allow pipelines through their property.

However, there are two significant developments that have happened this year. First, a very important piece of legislation, SB106, was passed by the Virginia legislature, prohibiting hydraulic fracturing in the Eastern Virginia Groundwater Management Area (Taylorsville Basin). Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused declining gasoline demand and has reduced the amount of greenhouse gases (GHGs) being released into our atmosphere. So air quality has improved a bit, while many fracking companies are on the brink of or have filed for bankruptcy. That will result in consolidation within the industry, as the huge fossil fuel giants will gobble up the bankrupt fracking companies and their wells. Businesses run in cycles and the industry may slowly recover, so we have to be watchful. But I decided that fracking issues, in our Region, while still a concern, have been re-prioritized to a lesser degree in my mind.

Thoughts of the environment became secondary, as I and everyone else hunkered down to weather the pandemic. The prime directive was to stay safe, stay healthy, stay alive, by wearing masks, staying socially distant, washing your hands, and my nemesis, stop biting my nails. It's difficult to worry about the impact of fracking when life and death stares directly into your eyes. But that doesn't stop the need for environmental vigilance. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) pointed out that poor air quality causes more severe [asthma attacks](#). Those problems disproportionately affect our most vulnerable communities, where minorities and poor live.

If we don't stop spewing GHGs into the atmosphere, Virginia is slated to become a very hot state. So what should I do? Should I examine what nasty critters might move north as our climate warms? Figure out how migration patterns will change for birds, bees, and other wildlife and how that will increase species' extinctions? Become politically active and campaign against politicians who support polluters instead of ordinary citizens? Help educate people about environmental issues?

Before I could decide, things got worse. A few years ago, I was part of a peaceful protest in Montross, in Westmoreland County, against fracking in the Taylorsville Basin. We filled a local parking lot near county buildings, prior to a Board of Supervisors meeting. People driving by mostly encouraged us, while a few made it clear that they opposed us. We were allowed to peacefully protest without incident or interference.

George Floyd, and many others, have died at the hands of someone who is supposed to protect them, a police officer. He is another example of what is happening to a group of Americans simply because of the color of their skin. In Lafayette Park, a multi-racial group of people peacefully protested against systemic racism, police brutality, and unequal treatment under the law.

The Government ordered police and National Guard troops to use tear gas and rubber bullets to forcefully remove protestors, because Trump wanted a photo-op. We have a President who wants to emulate "strongman" dictators and do whatever he wants, including using the US military against US citizens. He ignores our founding principles.

The First Amendment to the US Bill of Rights reads as follows: "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*" We have the right to protest peacefully, and no politician has the right to take that away from us.

The Sierra Club has taken a stand against the use of force on peaceful protestors. Follow this [link](#) to the Sierra Club's Statement on Trump's State-Sanctioned Violence Against Protesters.

MEMO FROM THE CHAIR, BILL JOHNSON CONT.

Again I ask, what can I do? And the answer is - tackle the things I can hope to fix. At the moment, I have been introduced to a college student who wants to make a difference. While I can't stop Covid-19, I can influence the future of the environmental movement, and I can help those activists that want to work towards fixing things.

This newsletter and the state-wide Virginia Sierran, along with the RGSC website and Facebook have published two examples of our intern's efforts, a series of articles on denialism. You should read them. She has also written a few letters to the Free Lance-Star (FLS) editor. One was published, pointing out how the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's (FAMPO) Long Range Transportation Plan didn't mention anything about electric vehicles or electric infrastructure like charging stations, despite projections that the use of electric vehicles will explode in the future. As an example, California just issued an edict mandating that all new work vehicles be electric starting in 2024. And finally, she has been attending multiple virtual environmental seminars and writing reports to inform our ExCom about the webinars.

We look each year for intern activists who are interested in our environment and who want to work towards fixing some of the problems facing us before they become intractable. Those who are interested should go to our website, friend us on Facebook, and contact our ExCom.

There are still things each of us can do, so ACT. Do so now, before things get worse. Think about this: Climate change is making hurricanes more frequent and powerful. What will be the impact on Virginia Beach, or any East Coast city, if a major hurricane strikes during a pandemic? We have a better chance to stop climate change if we do something, than if we do nothing.

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AN EPIC ELECTION YEAR FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: UNLEASHING THE POWER OF OUR VOTE, LINDA MULLER, VICE CHAIR

We are moving into summer 2020 and into the most consequential elections in our lifetime. 2020 is a Presidential election year and includes Congressional and Senate elections.

The Record Speak for Itself: Polluters Paradise

Over the past 3 1/2 years, we have witnessed the Trump Administration's dismantling of important environmental rules that have served to protect human health, the environment, and reduce green house gases. The rollbacks continue even during the COVID 19 pandemic crisis.

According to a May 20, 2020 New York Times article, the Trump Administration has or is in the process of eviscerating 100 Environmental Rules. The Trump Administration has undertaken rollbacks in mercury emissions, allow coal ash dumping in streams, increase carbon dioxide emissions, relaxed air pollution controls for coal fired plants, limiting wildlife protections, weakened wetlands. The New York Times full article : <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks.html>

Communities At Risk

It is well documented that certain communities suffer more from the impacts of pollution and the climate crisis and calls for Environmental Justice.

From 2019, Leon W. Russell, Chairman NAACP Board of Directors,

"The climate crisis disproportionately impacts communities of color, whether it's flooding, displacement or proximity of industrial pollution sites near our communities increasing health-related problems or the failure to have equal access to economic opportunities in the green economy – our communities are suffering and caught in the middle,"

<https://www.naacp.org/latest/naacp-chair-attend-state-union-highlight-climate-justice-civil-rights-issue/>

From the American Lung Association:

"The burden of air pollution is not evenly shared. Poorer people and some racial and ethnic groups are among those who often face

higher exposure to pollutants and who may experience greater responses to such pollution"

<https://www.lung.org/clean-air/outdoors/who-is-at-risk/disparities>

Unleashing the Power of Our Vote-Get Engaged!

In 2020 we need to elect pro-environmental candidates who acknowledge and support policies to address: the catastrophic impacts of climate change, the health impacts of unbridled pollution, to preserve and protect our green spaces and water resources, and work to address environmental injustice.

Many of us sheltering place ask..."but what can I do?" The good news: Plenty!

It IS possible to engage in campaigns and elections during COVID 19 pandemic, but we must do so safely and carefully. The Sierra Club Independent Action has launched an interactive site to help any interested environmental activist to reach out to voters via phone, texts, emails or even postcards. You can do this in the safety of your shelter-in-place. The Sierra Club Independent Action is the biggest volunteer effort in Sierra Club's history. **Election Day is Tuesday November 3, 2020.** Lets prepare to unleash the power of our vote.

Check out the Sierra Club Independent Action website and sign-up today:

<https://www.sierraclubindependentaction.org>

More Virginia Voter Resources

Are you registered to vote? If yes, never hurts to double check, go to:

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

Want to register to vote? Fantastic! go to:

<https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/Registration/Eligibility>

Because of health concerns, I do not want to risk voting in person, what can I do? Vote Absentee by mail! Go to

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

A GRIEVING ACTIVIST: A LETTER, PAULA CHOW

Dear Mother Earth,

Because of you, I am an environmental activist and fervent steward of the earth. While growing up in Hawaii, I was intoxicated with the fragrance of the flora, in awe of the beauty and power of the ocean, fascinated with volcanos and geology, and enamored by the amazing diversity of tropical nature. As a young adult, I skied magnificent slopes and climbed mountains in the Sierra Nevada range in eastern California. These outdoor experiences secured my deep appreciation for all things Mother Earth and, hence, my commitment to protect you.

I just turned 70 before this year of the pandemic. It feels like the 50 years of work to protect the environment has gone by the wayside. Single-use plastic bags are now a solution, not a problem. Somehow my elation of the decreased pollution as a result of the pandemic shut down is quickly interrupted by a reality check of how Americans won't take action on the climate crisis. I can't shake the fear that the climate crisis will soon parallel this pandemic, only worse.

I am shocked at the environmental rollbacks. I am so angry with the current administration and the EPA. My eyes are wide open with the need for sanitation and massive disposables. I take my daily walks, still marveling at nature. But it is only for the moment. My behavior has changed. I walk pass litter; no longer do I dare pick it up unprepared. I am not peddling reusable bags – society claims contamination. I am paralyzed with inaction. I have no energy. I don't want to fight the same fight all over again. I am grieving.

I grieve the loss of my enthusiasm – enthusiasm and creativity for promoting eco-friendly living and stewardship of the earth. I grieve the loss of our gains to protect the environment. I grieve the loss of wilderness to greed. I grieve the loss of the climate crisis being a priority. I grieve so much. I am grieving.

But I will come out of this. My commitment has never changed. You see, I am occasionally connected to young adults who are a young version of myself. I have hope when I connect with them. They will lead and bring me along.

Forever your steward,

Paula Chow

ECO-FRIENDLY &/OR THRIFTY PANDEMIC TIPS, PAULA CHOW

Sanitation and Disinfectants

Combine 1/3 cup of bleach and 1 gallon of water to make a disinfectant for a spray bottle.

Use cut up old T-shirts and old socks as rags instead of disposable paper towels.

Shopping

When you use a grocery cart or basket, while checking out, ask the cashier to put the groceries/items back in to the cart or basket unbagged. Proceed to your vehicle and bag your items in your reusable bags. Tell your friends and family to do this, too.

At the Farmers Market, tell the cashier that you will put the produce into your own reusable bag. (They will not be allowed to touch reusable bags.)

Conservation

When washing your hands, after you first wet them, turn the water off – 20 seconds of running water adds up to a heck of a lot of water just running down the drain.

Share your harvest with less fortunate folks – identify them ahead of time so it will only take a text or call when the harvest comes in.

Did you know that the clothes dryer consumes the most energy of all household appliances? Use less energy (fossil fuels) – hang up your laundry. Use clothes hangers if you don't have a drying rack. With this summer heat, the laundry will dry quickly indoors or outdoors.

Save and share the Free Lance Star Kids Activity Page – find a family who can use them.

Community

Make a plan to pick up litter once a week.

Help folks – neighbors, public places – pull weeds BEFORE they seed – perhaps 5 minutes of pulling weeds each day. Can you spare that?

A WALK IN THE WOODS, SUZANNE EGGELING, OUTINGS CO-CHAIR

“The Japanese practice of forest bathing uses trees to calm, boost creativity, and reconnect with nature”.

Current requirements to stay at home and social distance have brought limitations; fortunately, most of us are still able to get out for walks in our neighborhoods so it's wonderful seeing more folks doing this. Some have ready access to green spaces in our neighborhoods, others are limited walking in predominantly man-made surroundings. Deep within all is a greater need to get out - it is to connect with the earth and it most satisfying. Indeed, it is interesting to learn that 'walking in the woods' for us translates to our Japanese counterparts enjoying 'shinrin-yoku'.

The Japanese practice of 'shinrin-yoku', or forest bathing, is intriguing. 'Shrin' means forest, and 'yoku' means bath. So shinrin-yoku means bathing in the forest atmosphere or taking in the forest through our senses. This is not exercise, hiking or jogging, but rather connecting with it through our senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. We have a sensory connection with forests that reduces stress.

As a society, we suffer from a 'nature deficit disorder'. Presently more than 54% of people live in urban areas. This number is projected to grow to 66% by 2050. Living in a concrete walled, noisy, urban environment takes something away from our very essential primal need to be close to nature. Studies have shown that by spending dedicated time around trees 'shinrin-yoku', can improve health and promote happiness. Japan has large expanses of green forests which are popular. For 'maximum benefit' and to balance out the crush of urban living, many of the visitors to these forests enjoy shinrin-yoku.

The foremost expert of forest medicine, and an immunologist, Dr. Qing Li, of the Tokyo Nippon Medical School, has explained how forest bathing can reduce our stress levels. He states that

it reduces blood pressure, strengthening our immune and cardiovascular systems. It boosts energy, mood, creativity, and concentration and helps us to live longer. Dr. Li's book, *Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness*, introduces readers to the healing practice of forest bathing, and the art and science of how trees can enrich our lives: Lose ourselves in the beauty of our surroundings, leave everyday stress behind, and reach a place of calm and wellness.

We've had some lovely hikes with Sierra Club during 2018 and 2019 and hope to again in 2020. Some of my favorite walks are Crow's Nest and Montpelier Estate to Grelen Nursery. I'm happy that participation has been high, and these outings have attracted both married couples and singles. In the interim, I do miss organizing and enjoying these Rappahannock Group Sierra Club outings and hope we can "really get out there", again by fall. Until then, I hope you can make your own connection with nature and enjoy your own quiet walk somewhere among the trees.

References:

Dr. Qing Li - Chairman of the Japanese Society for Forest Medicine and author of 'Forest Bathing: How Trees Can Help You Find Health and Happiness' (2018)

Sunny Fitzgerald - 'The Secret to Mindful Travel? A Walk in the Woods', National Geographic (NatGeo@Home)

OTHER LINKS

Virginia Conservation Network www.vcnva.org	Center www.southernenvironment.org
Virginia League of Conservation Voters www.valcv.org	Friends of the Rappahannock www.riverfriends.org
Southern Environmental Law	Tree Fredericksburg www.treefredericksburg.org

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2020 VIRGINIA CHAPTER GROUP SUMMIT, RICHARD EGGELING, CO-CHAIR

COVID-19 restrictions permitting, our VA 2020 Annual Gathering is scheduled for Saturday November 7th, 9:30 am to 5:00 pm, at the Natural Bridge Historic Hotel and Conference Center (a comfortable 2-1/2 hour/150-mile drive from Fredericksburg). This year's event will resemble a Group Summit where the focus will be getting acquainted with all eleven far-flung Groups within the VA Chapter; it marks one of the few occasions when Virginia Chapter staff, our leaders, seasoned SC veterans, experts (whose articles and reports we often read) and our valued, new SC members, can all connect.

The Natural Bridge State Park 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.

In keeping with a "Group Summit" theme, each of the eleven Groups will be invited to make a presentation of their wins/losses of the year and share ideas for the future, certainly a more sane, pleasant 2021. Our Group leaders and Chapter staff will discuss environmental and justice work occurring around the state. We will also have two keynote speakers - Chief Kenneth Branham of the Monacan Indian Nation and Dr. Melissa Baker, the new head of the Virginia State Park System.

An entry fee of \$15/person allows full participation in the day's agenda as well as soft beverages throughout the day but excludes lunch. For an additional \$20/person, a catered, hot, complete, Italian buffet lunch will be served in the large, well-appointed ballroom VASC has rented for this event.

During the 90-minute lunch break anyone wishing to stretch their legs will have time to take in the unique Limestone Bridge Gorge itself.

For those of us wishing to stay overnight (on Friday or Saturday night) rooms can be booked at a discounted rate of \$80/night. To spare our Richmond staff the burden of ensuring accommodations meet individual needs, each SC member wishing to stay overnight please call 540-291-2121 and ask for 'Reservations'; please identify yourself as an SC member to receive the discounted rate.

The June edition of The Sierran will provide more details. If any RGSC member has questions, please call Richard or Suzanne Eggeling at 540-710-6424

PASS ON PLASTIC AND MORE, PAULA CHOW

The Pass On Plastic campaign has come to a halt at this time due to the pandemic. Grocery stores and the Farmers Market do not want anything reusable. In spite of this, whether or not you wash your reusable bags regularly or each time after use, I encourage you to bring them and use them. When you take a grocery cart or basket to shop, have the cashier (or you) place the purchased items back in the cart or basket without bags. Proceed to your vehicle where your reusable bags are stashed, then bag your groceries from the cart or basket into your reusable bags. Use the net produce bags similarly. That was not that much extra effort, really.

Single-use plastic bags are fossil fuel derived! Those of us who are committed to stewardship of the earth can figure out ways to still not use these bags during pandemic times. Keep in mind that paper bags have a different resource depletion issue. Paper bags range from 100% recycled content to 40%. Regardless of the recycled content, the use of a precious resource, water, is heavily needed to manufacture paper bags. Of course, water consumption for every individual globally has increased with handwashing during this pandemic. Water depletion is a serious climate crisis issue. Let's start acting now

rather than awaiting the actual crisis. Just use your reusable bags in a creative but responsible way!

I have switched from sewing reusable net produce bags to reusable fabric face masks. In March, emails were sent to the Pass On Plastic volunteers and other contacts requesting assistance to sew masks for Mary Washington Healthcare (MWH) per their request to meet a 5,000 mask challenge. That was quickly met with a community-wide response. I have also been providing masks with ties to nursing homes and public housing residents. Masks will continue to be sewn on an ongoing basis until a vaccine is available nationally to all. Face shields can also be made - no sewing needed. The only difficulty is sourcing elastic which is still "impossible" to find in stores or online. The MWH website has all the information needed for both masks and face shields.

Some individuals, **Anne Little, Stephanie Cherubin** and **Kathleen Walsh** responded with generous monetary donations for supplies. **Melissa Felts** and **Jon Gerlach** have donated fabric for masks. Thank you, all!

THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY'S FAVORITE TOOL: ECONOMIC DENIALISM, KAYLI OTTOMANELLI, RGSC INTERN

Since the arrival of the pandemic, the United States has lost nearly 600,000 clean energy jobs. Dan Gearino discusses those job losses in a May 21, 2020 *Inside Climate News* article titled "Inside Clean Energy: Here's How Covid-19 Is Affecting The Biggest Source of Clean Energy Jobs." According to a report issued by BW Research Partnership, 70 percent of the jobs lost were in energy efficiency, which includes manufacturers and installers of efficient lighting, appliances and heating systems, and many other categories. However, the devastating losses from this pandemic serve to highlight a major issue in this country, the lack of government initiative to steer the economy away from carbon dependency. Scientists have proven that carbon emissions caused by human activity are responsible for climate change and dramatically reducing emissions is critical to preserving our future. Despite this, many politicians and large corporations continue to advocate for economic policies that further exacerbate global warming. It seems difficult to understand how individuals can make such ill-advised decisions, but this can largely be attributed to economic denialism.

Economic denialism is a more subtle form of climate denial focusing on the costs and implications of the proposed policies to address climate change. Those relying on economic denialism like to argue that climate change is too expensive and impractical to fix and thus should be ignored. This logic is often employed by parties with a vested interest in perpetuating the current carbon-dependent economy, as a greener economy would reduce their profits considerably. Reports demonstrate that the fossil fuel industry has known about its role in climate change for nearly 60 years. On June 2, 2020, *The Guardian* published an article by John Cook and others titled "Exxon has misled Americans on climate change for decades. Here's how to fight back."

In 1954, the geochemist Harrison Brown submitted research to the American Petroleum Institute indicating that petroleum and other fossil fuels had caused atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to rise about 5% over the past century. Later in 1959, fossil fuel industry leaders were notified of the dangers of rising carbon dioxide levels by the physicist Edward Teller, who warned them of warming global temperatures and sea-level rise in the future. Benjamin Franta wrote a 2018 piece for *Nature Climate Change* titled "Early oil industry knowledge of CO₂ and global warming" discussing the same thing. Brown and Teller were not alone in their reports and industry leaders were made well aware that their fossil fuel products were generating carbon emissions that would produce dangerous consequences. Instead of using this information to alert the public or change their behavior, fossil fuel companies have spent the last several decades investing millions in disinformation campaigns aimed at delaying climate action, per John Cook. Polluting both the Earth and the information landscape, these companies spread economic denialism to plant doubt in individuals that climate change can be addressed in a practical and affordable manner.

Despite the arguments of economic denialists, economists have proposed a plan to fix climate change that is both practical and affordable. This plan entails spending 1 percent of the world gross domestic product (GDP) to cut carbon emissions, which would gradually fix climate change. Brian Kahn, in a May 19, 2020 *Climate Central* article titled "10 Years on, Climate Economists Reflect on Stern Review" discussed this. While this may seem expensive, world GDP grows by 3.5 percent every year so the GDP used to address the climate crisis would be quickly regenerated. Mark Maslin, wrote, in May 18, 2020 edition of *Science Alert*, an article titled "Here Are Five of The Main Reasons People Continue to Deny Climate Change." Furthermore, the economic damage caused by ignoring climate change is valued up to 20 percent of world GDP, costing 20 times more GDP than just addressing the problem outright, per Brian Kahn. Many may be wondering where this 1 percent of world GDP would come from. The solution is simple, it would come from reducing subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and pricing their products more efficiently, per Mark Maslin. He points out that the annual subsidies of the fossil fuel industry amount to \$5.2 trillion or 6 percent of world GDP. The International Monetary Fund estimates that pricing fossil fuels more efficiently would lower global carbon emissions by 28 percent, reduce fossil fuel air pollution deaths by 46 percent, and increase government revenue by 3.8 percent of the country's GDP. Therefore, cutting subsidies and adjusting fossil fuel prices would easily produce the revenue necessary to fund efforts to fix climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that in order to prevent surface temperatures from rising to levels that would bring global catastrophe, countries must halve their greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and hit net-zero emissions by 2050. Justin Worland wrote, in the June 3, 2020 edition of *Time Magazine* that "The Reason Fossil Fuel Companies Are Finally Reckoning With Climate Change." To reach these important goals it is imperative that fossil fuel companies stop wielding economic denialism as a weapon to protect their profits. Economists have shown that it is possible to repair the damage we have inflicted upon our planet and we must act before it is too late.

Newsletter Editor: In addition to this article, Kayli Ottomanelli wrote another article focused on denialists who dispute the science of climate change. See the July Virginia Sierran.