

Prince George's Sierra Club 2023 Year in Review

Goals for 2023 focused on community engagement, climate action, zero waste, and protections for natural places. Recognizing the need for more diverse perspectives, and wider community engagement, we reached out to a broader population through three Environmental Justice and You community forums, and stronger partnerships with Alpha Kappa Alpha and the Prince George's County Public Schools. We worked hard for legislation to decrease plastic waste and saw a positive outcome for local forest conservation.

The leadership team met monthly. Most meetings were virtual. When three elected ExCom members resigned because of other commitments, the rest of the team doubled down and new volunteers stepped forward. The Prince George's County Sierra Club leadership team for 2023 is listed below. The elected voting members of the Executive Committee are indicated in bold.



- **Janet Gingold**, Chair; Conservation Chair; Outings Chair; Climate Action Team Co-lead; Communications team; Political Committee
- **Joseph Jakuta**, Vice Chair. Climate Parents, Communications Team (Social Media)
- **James Lawson**, Delegate to Chapter Executive Committee
- **Lily Fountain**, Secretary, Alternate Delegate to Chapter Executive Committee; Natural Places Team Lead; Outings Leader
- **Antoine Thompson**, Transportation team; Outreach
- **Na'ilah Dawkins**, Membership Chair; Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Team Lead
- Nancy Hammond, Treasurer
- Martha Ainsworth, Zero Waste Chair
- Nick Orrick, Political Committee Chair; Transportation Team Lead
- Janis Oppelt, Communications Team, Zero Waste Team, Nominations Committee
- John Straub, Webmaster

Additional SuperVolunteers

- Anne Riley, Emerita
- Richard Winston, outings support, events support
- Jack Kangas, stewardship

- Dave Brosch, Stormwater Management forum, art contest and traveling art show
- Elisabeth Herschbach, art contest and traveling art show
- Maureen Fine, Climate Action Team, natural places champion

CLIMATE ACTION

The Climate Action Team’s goals centered around implementation of the County’s Climate Action Plan. However, the County’s Climate Action Task Force to align county operations with the Climate Action Plan worked primarily behind closed doors and our allies who had positions on the Climate Resident Advisory Group reported frustration with the limited input they had in the working of the Task Force. So, PGSC’s Climate Action Team turned toward community engagement. We organized three major educational events to continue our “Environmental Justice and You” series. We used our [website](#), [social media](#), and mass emails and to promote acceleration of the transition to renewable energy, electrification, reduction of plastic waste, composting and forest conservation. To engage the general public in more thinking about climate problems and solutions, we also partnered with Prince George’s County Public Schools to provide prizes for their [EcoAction Art contest](#). This activity led over 200 students, supported by their families and teachers, to express their ideas about climate change through visual art. Exhibition of student work in the County’s spring art shows, and then in the traveling art shows organized by PGSC volunteers, provided opportunities to engage with students and their families about the importance of sharing ideas about climate solutions. In testimony before the County Council, we continued to keep equity and climate-conscious decision-making front-and-center in advocacy for transit-oriented development, lower carbon transportation options, and funding for implementation of the climate action plan.

ZERO WASTE

For our powerful Zero Waste team, 2023 was the Year of the Reusable bag, when we finally saw passage of plastic bag legislation by Prince George’s County (June), as well as the municipalities of College Park (February), Greenbelt (May), and Laurel (July). We



advised County Council members about best practices from around the country and data from local shoppers surveys and saw resulting legislation that prohibits prohibits all retail establishments from providing plastic carryout bags to shoppers and requires that retailers shall charge at least 10 cents for each paper carryout or reusable bag provided to a customer. The Zero Waste team helped usher in this county-wide transition away from single-use carryout bags through webinars, action alerts, meetings with public officials, email communications, public outreach, and delivering flyers and

reusable bags to food bank patrons. To foster a strong rollout of the new policy, we

provided a virtual briefing “**The Better Bag Bill: What municipalities need to know,**” for 20 participants from 9 municipalities (November). We created a **Bilingual poster** for tabling events at Festival del Rio Anacostia, Laurel, Bowiefest, the Green Summit. We purchased and distributed **400 canvas reusable bags** at 4 food banks, **4,800 County flyers** at 11 food banks (December). We provided feedback to DOE on brochures webpages; briefing for Food Equity Council.

The Zero Waste team met virtually each monthly. We hosted educational tours of the Materials Recycling Facility, the Organics Composting Facility, the Brown Station Road Sanitary Landfill, and the Ritchie Land Reclamation Landfill, and participated with SWAC in a tour of TurboHaul Mattress Recycling. We also monitored the roll out of the food service accessories “on request” bill, continued tracking of synthetic turf fields for statewide legislation, collaborating with the Solid Waste Advisory Commission, and laid the groundwork for a future event on illegal dumping, and updated the website. We also contributed to mass emails about reduction of plastic waste and expansion of the County’s curbside composting program to augment publicity about the curbside compost pickup program for unincorporated areas and supported the efforts toward composting programs in municipalities.



Tours of Organics Composting Facility, July 2023 and Ritchie Land Reclamation Landfill, August 2023



OUTINGS

The PGSC Outings team started 2023 with a goal to have an outing each month. While two scheduled outings got rained out, we led 10 hikes, two service outings, and 2 outings leader training sessions. We also participated in training for measuring big trees and removing invasive vines. We welcomed two new provisional outings leaders to the team and look forward to their certification in 2024.



First Day Hike at Jug Bay Natural Area

Title	Date	Participants
First Day Hike at Jug Bay Natural Area	Jan 1	19
Winter Walk at Patuxent Research Refuge South Tract	Feb 26	11
Spring Flowers at Watkins Park	Mar 12	10
Outings Leader Training at Watkins Park	Mar 18	12
Growing Green with Pride at Oak Creek West	Apr 22	6
City Nature Challenge: Nature Finds at Watkins Park	Apr 29	1
City Nature Challenge: Nature Finds at Greenbelt Park	Apr 30	4
Springtime Walk at Jug Bay Natural Area	May 28	14
Walk in the Woods at Patuxent Research Refuge North Tract	Jun 24	12
Hyattsville Invasive Vine Removal Training	Jul 15	5
Enjoy and Protect Watkins Park	Jul 20	6
Late Summer Walk at Watkins Park	Aug 26	6
Autumn Exploration at Jug Bay Natural Area	Oct 28	22
Thanksgiving Walk at Patuxent Research Refuge South Tract	Nov 26	14
Outings Leader Training at Watkins Park	Nov 5	4
Scheduled outings at Susquehanna State Park (Oct 14) and Cedarville State Forest (Dec 17) were rained out		



Outings participants enjoy the shade of a large tulip tulip tree in Watkins Park in August



The view from the observation deck at Jug Bay Natural Area never disappoints



Cash Lake at Patuxent Research Refuge, North Tract



PGSC volunteers participate in Growing Green with Pride with trash pick-up at Oak Creek West Park

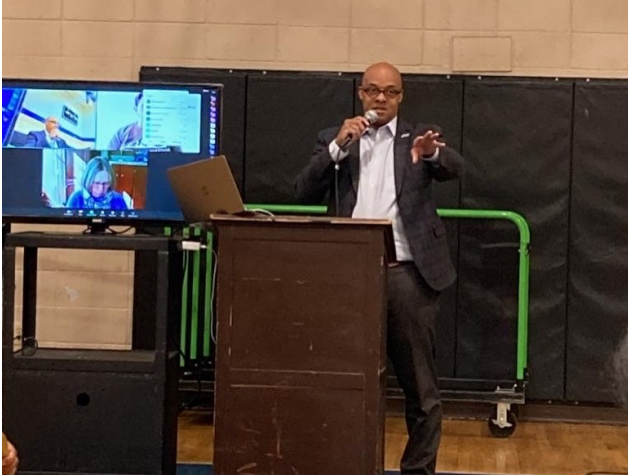


Outings participants enjoy the view of the Patuxent River

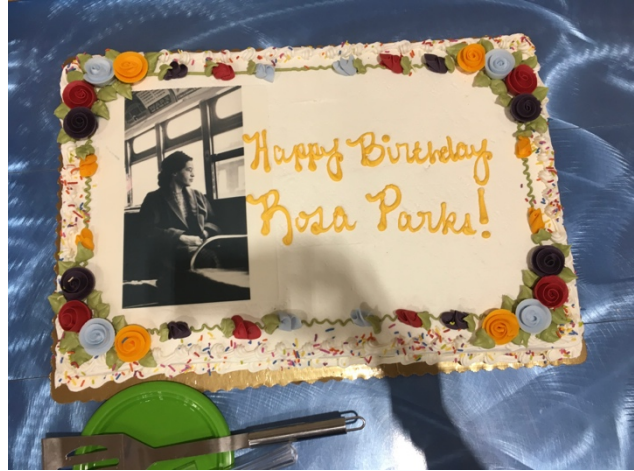
EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

PGSC hosted educational events about Climate Action, Zero Waste, and Civic Engagement. The Climate Action Team continued the Environmental Justice and You series, with community forums on [Transportation Equity](#), [Tree Equity](#), and [Stormwater Management](#). These hybrid sessions, in partnership with Alpha Kappa Alpha, included presentations by expert speakers as well as facilitated small-group discussions and lunch. (The Stormwater session was funded in part by a grant from Maryland Chapter). We celebrated the presentation of the Environmental Service Award to Maureen Fine for Outstanding Work Nurturing Local Ecosystems. Our partnership with Alpha Kappa Alpha also led to an opportunity to lead a program about Trees and Climate Change for middle schoolers in AKA's Youth Leadership Initiative; the program included a presentation about the Watkins Park ecosystem and a quiz game. We partnered with Dave Brosch and others for an informative session on Stormwater Challenges, Adaptations and Future Needs, providing publicity and some help with the zoom room. ExCom member Joseph Jakuta hosted a webinar on April 13, 2023 on how to follow Prince George's County Council legislation, including when are opportunities to comment, how to use the legislation notification system, and how to provide comments. The recording is available here: <https://youtu.be/zqK3j7108eU?si=8g5zTQyRx7e4s9eN>

What	Where	When	Participants
Environmental Justice and You: Transportation Equity	Columbia Park Community Center/Zoom	Feb 4	50
Trees and Climate Change: A program for AKA's Youth Leadership Initiative	South Bowie Library	Apr 1	25
Prince George's County Civic Engagement Workshop	Zoom	Apr 13	10
Environmental Justice and You: Tree Equity	Gethsemane United Methodist Church/Zoom	May 20	43
Stormwater Management: Challenges, Adaptations, Future Needs	University of MD School of Architecture/Zoom	Jun 22	(40)
Environmental Justice and You: Stormwater Management	Mount Rainier Nature Center/Zoom	Oct 7	51



Antoine Thompson facilitatig the Environmental Justice and You: Transportation Equity forum



The EJ and You: Transportation Equity forum on Transit Equity Day included a celebration of Rosa Parks's birthday



Alpha Kappa Alpha joins Sierra Club for Transit Equity Day celebration



University of Maryland's Priscila Alvez draws connections between storm water and environmental justice and participants share their ideas in small group discussions



Friends who worked with Maureen Fine during her decades of activities nurturing local ecosystems help celebrate her Environmental Service Award



Participants at Environmental Justice and You: Tree Equity at Gethsemane United Methodist Church in Capitol Heights listen to a presentation about the role of trees in addressing the problem of climate change.

LOCAL FOREST CONSERVATION

In 2023, the Prince George's Group celebrated a good outcome for a large tract of forest that the Girl Scout Council of the Nations' Capital wanted to sell for development. In 2022, an [article](#) in the PGSC online issues forum, a [Washington Post op ed](#), and an AddUp campaign that generated over a thousand letters seemed to have little effect on the Girl Scout corporate decision makers. However, when a very committed Virginia Girl Scout found these items on line, she activated her troop and other Virginia scouts to

create their own campaign to protect the forest. With such vigorous advocacy from within their own organization, the Girl Scouts eventually came to an agreement with M-NCPPC through which 537 acres will become part of Charles Branch Stream Valley Park instead of being sold to developers! Kudos to our young friends across the Potomac, to Prince George's Group Chair Janet Gingold, Natural Places Chair Lily Fountain, the Prince George's County Sierra Club, and to everyone who signed the petitions and sent letters to the Girl Scouts! Read more in this [Bay Journal article](#) about how Janet's words inspired young Girl Scouts to raise their voices and help keep this land forested.

ADVOCACY LETTERS/TESTIMONY

- Comments to the PHED Committee to support CB-17-2023, which will reverse a spot-zoning action (CB-19-2019) regarding the Freeway Airport and adjacent properties in Bowie (January 3, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-8-2023 that would establish a solar task force in accordance with the climate action plan (January 16, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-12-2023 that would limit sprawl development (January 16, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-13-2023, a bill that would repeal CB-69-2022 and reverse the text amendment that allows properties formerly zoned M-X-T to elect to conform to the requirement of the CGO (Commercial, General Office) Zone (January 16, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-14-2023, a bill that would repeal CB-77-2022 and reverse changes made to the transition provisions of the Zoning Ordinance (January 16, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-018-2023, a bill that would repeal CB-97-2022 and re-establish certain standards for expedited development in the Local Transit Oriented (LTO) (January 16, 2023)
- Letter to County Executive Alsobrooks commends you for Executive Order #5-2022, a directive for all county agencies and county-funded operations to initiate and support immediate action to implement climate solutions for Prince George's County (January 26, 2023)
- Comments to the TIEE Committee and Prince George's County Council in support of CB-019-2023 that would establish Resilience Hubs (January 26, 2023)
- Testimony to the Environment and Transportation Committee in favor of HB 723 "Natural Resources – Forest Preservation and Retention" (March 1, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-002-2023 that would reform the process for amending the zoning ordinance (March 6, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-003-2023 that would amend the decision standards for approval of detailed site plans (March 6, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-005-2023 that would limit the time period in the Zoning Ordinance for development of gas station uses according to the prior ordinance (March 6, 2023)
- Oral remarks to Council members and DPIE acting director at Town Hall about DPIE (March 21, 2023)

- Testimony to the PCounty Council on the County operating budget (April 28, 2023)
- Comments to the Prince George's County Planning Board and District Council on The Bowie-Mitchellville and Vicinity Sectional Map Amendment (May 8, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-50-2023 that would limit and prohibit Townhouse and One-Family Attached Dwellings in the former R-A Zone, respectively (May 30, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-53-2023 and its goals of reigning in the inappropriate use of zoning text amendments that undermine long-term planning (May 30, 2023)
- Comments to the PHED Committee and the County Council to support CB-52-2023 with amendments, a bill that would address the technical issues raised by the planning board (June 13, 2023)
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-32-202,3 the "Better Bag Bill" (June 19, 2023)
- Comments to the TIEE Committee and Prince George's County Council in support of CR-67-2023 that would update the Urban Street Design Policy and Standards (September 9, 2023)
- Comments to the TIEE Committee and Prince George's County Council in support of CR-68-2023 that will amend "General Specifications and Standards for Highway and Street Construction" and the "Specifications and Standards for Highway Traffic Signals" to reflect the 2023 Urban Street Design Standards (September 9, 2023)
- Comments to the TIEE Committee and Prince George's County Council in support of CB-69-2023 that would adopt requirements to implement the Urban Street Design Policy and Standards (September 9, 2023)
- Comments to the TIEE Committee opposing of CB-79-2023 that would provide for exemptions to the Better Bag Bill (September 28, 2023)
- Comments to the PHED Committee to support CB-83-2023, which will
- require the allocation of building permits to align with the County's land-use and development policies in Prince George's County (October 15, 2023)
- Testimony to the Prince George's County Planning Board on the MNCPPC operating budget (October 30, 2023) including advocacy for acquiring Marlton Forest
- Comments to the County Council in support of CB-69-2023 that would adopt Urban Street Design Policy and Standards (November 10, 2023)
- Testimony to the Prince George's County House Delegation in support of PG-106-24, with amendment, regarding Zoning and Land Use (November 30, 2023)
- Testimony to the Prince George's County House Delegation in support of PG-106-24 regarding community benefit agreements (November 30, 2023)
- Testimony to the Prince George's County House Delegation in support of PG-402-24 regarding the Establishment of an Independent Innovation Agency for Prince George's County (November 30, 2023)

PARTNERSHIP WITH PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 2023, the Climate Change Action Campaign led by ExCom member Joseph Jakuta continued to see success through:

- Advocating for budget allocations for green initiatives in PGCPS
- Campaigning for safe routes to schools
- Meeting with the new Sustainability Officer for PGCPS
- Writing an [op-ed published in Maryland Matters](#) on school energy progress and what is needed in 2024

The Prince George's Sierra Club also partnered with the PGCPS William S. Schmidt Outdoor Education Center in supporting the 2nd Annual EcoAction Art Contest, *Climate Action: If not you, who; If not now, when?* PGSC volunteers David Brosch, Elisabeth Herschbach, and Janet Gingold helped to select winners and presented prizes at the PGCPS Art Shows County. Dave and Elisabeth also organized a travelling art show to showcase notable works in public spaces during the ensuing year to engage the community in thinking and discussing climate solutions. The new partnership with schools also led to sharing of information about using iNaturalist to engage students and teachers in the City Nature Challenge

COMMUNICATIONS

Social Media

Posting on Facebook/Instagram continued during 2023. YouTube was added on and Threads was added on ? We stopped posting on Twitter after Elon Musk's anti-semitic tweets in October 2023. Some of the post highlights were:

- Expanded into video posts early in 2023, but pared back once the volunteer with video skills left the ExCom.
- Regular promotion of hikes, cleanups, workgroup meetings (e.g., Zero Waste Group), and other activities.
- The regularly scheduled #FloraFaunaFriday with a picture of an animal or plant taken in Prince George's began again in early 2023 and continued fairly regularly throughout the year.
- Promoted state chapter posts, as well as select posts from partner organizations.

Posts are coordinated between all three accounts and images for events and advocacy opportunities are made using Adobe Photoshop Mix for iOS and pictures made. More details about our social media activity is available [here](#).

Emails to members and supporters

In 2023, the Communications team sent 34 emails to members and supporters, providing information about local environmental issues and advocacy campaigns, volunteer opportunities, scheduled outdoor activities and educational events, climate action tips, plastic waste reduction, composting, the transition to reusable carryout bags, and other sustainable consumer choices.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

After a very busy (and successful) election year in 2022, this year was mostly a time to rest, recover, and evaluate. We began evaluation of candidates for the critical national election in 2024, including Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks candidacy for the US Senate.

With several state legislators taking positions in the new governor's administration, we explored influencing the appointment of replacements and supported ExCom member Antoine Thompson in his bid for appointment to the House of Delegates.

TRANSPORTATION

We continued efforts to stem expansion of highways, encourage more alternative transportation, and promote transit oriented development. We commented on plans to put toll lanes on the Wilson Bridge which would undercut efforts to get rail transit on the Bridge. We supported Safe Streets initiative in the County Council to help reduce hazards for pedestrians and bicyclists. We continued efforts to prevent inappropriate zoning text amendments that would allow destructive development where there is insufficient infrastructure to support it. We monitored development of the Purple Line and Maglev. We testified at the annual Prince George's Delegation meeting on bills affecting environmental efforts and provided input on Maryland Climate Plan.

TABLING EVENTS

In 2023, the Prince George's Sierra Club participated in the following community events by providing informational materials and engaging with the public. Popular activities included a Jeopardy-style quiz game and a Recycle Right hands-on sorting game

- Student Environmental Alliance Summit, Bowie State University, April 18, 2023
- Greenman Festival, Greenbelt, May 13-14
- BowieFest, Allen Pond Park, Bowie, June 3
- University Park Meadow Day, University Park, July 8
- Sustainable Saturday, Laurel, August 12
- Festival del Rio Anacostia, Bladensburg Waterfront Park, September 30
- Prince George's County Green Summit, Driskell Park, Hyattsville, October 21
- Bowie Veterans 5K, Bowie Town Center, November 4

(Janet Gingold, Joseph Jakuta, Martha Ainsworth, Nick Orrick, and Na'ilah Dawkins contributed to this report.)



