

William E. Colby Memorial Library

Sierra Club  
Oakland, California

Sierra Club Library Oral History Project

**Julie Popper**

*Julie Popper (Eisenhardt): Sierra Club Environmental Justice Organizer, 2000-2002*

Interview conducted by  
Cailee Beltran  
in 2025

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the Sierra Club Foundation and the William E. Colby Memorial Library.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club has grown and evolved dramatically during its more than 133 years of existence. During that time, many gifted and dedicated men and women have helped to shape the organization's direction, while the Club itself has played an important role in influencing conservation policy and environmental history. Although the Sierra Club's official archives have been housed at the University of California's Bancroft Library since the latter part of the 20th century, the Sierra Club's William E. Colby Memorial Library (Colby Library) continues to serve as a resource for those who are interested in the Sierra Club's history.

Since 1970, the Sierra Club has collaborated with the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library (formerly the Regional Oral History Office), collecting interviews from devoted leaders, volunteers, and contributors of the Sierra Club. In 2019, the Colby Library embarked on a new oral history program to complement those created by the Oral History Center. These interviews and administrative work were performed by Sierra Club staff with a goal of collecting shorter, focused narratives of Sierra Club champions, to be compiled into subject-based collections.

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Note: Text in [square brackets] indicates language inserted by the editor for clarification.

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*Photo courtesy of Julie Popper.*

Julie Popper in Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, 2019

## Abstract

Julie Popper is a former environmental justice organizer with the Sierra Club's Environmental Justice Program and now serves as the media relations and communications strategist for the Washington Education Association. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on April 26th, 1978, Popper (née Eisenhardt) was raised in a union-organizing family that seeded in her a deep commitment to labor movements and progressive social causes from an early age. Popper earned a Bachelor of Arts in History and the History of Science from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1999, followed by a Master of Arts in Strategic Communication from Washington State University. As a PhD student in History at Johns Hopkins University, she became actively involved in graduate student labor organizing, advocating for pay equity and improved benefits. Her participation in these campaigns, alongside groups such as BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development) and ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now,) provided a formative experience in grassroots organizing and coalition-building.

In 2000, Popper joined the Sierra Club's newly formed and established Environmental Justice Program, working primarily in Washington, DC's Anacostia neighborhood, a historically Black community disproportionately affected by environmental injustice. In this oral history interview, Popper reflects on her role within the Sierra Club, which included establishing the program's office headquarters, fostering community relationships, as well as coordinating the Club's response to local needs and community involvement. Popper recounts her involvement in a range of environmental justice initiatives, including community campaigns to block the construction of a trash transfer station, address issues of gentrification and development, and resist pollution that threatened the land, air, and water of one of Washington, DC's most significant historically African American neighborhoods. Her reflections offer critical insights into the practice of community-centered environmental advocacy and the evolution of environmental justice organizing within the Sierra Club.

Cailee Beltran  
Oral History Associate  
Sierra Club–William E. Colby Library  
November 2025

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## Introduction

I first met Julie Eisenhardt-Popper across an interview table at the Sierra Club's old Washington, DC, offices in an old townhouse on Capitol Hill. It was early 2000, and the Washington DC Chapter had been selected to be among the first Environmental Justice (EJ) sites to receive funding through an EJ grant to the Sierra Club.

A Wisconsin native, Julie was young, very blond and very white, with a pierced tongue. She was interviewing to be our EJ Organizer working in the most impoverished and neglected communities of one of the few major cities that was majority Black. As interview teams often do, we wondered about "fit." But Julie exuded confidence. Her experience organizing in nearby Baltimore, her energy, and her passion for the EJ work were undeniable, so we hired her.

Julie won us over that day, just as she would win over the many leaders in the communities "East of the River" as the Chapter's first EJ organizer. As Chapter Chair, who was just starting on my own EJ journey, I learned so much from Julie about this work and was constantly amazed and inspired by what she was able to accomplish in these communities, who didn't need us to "save" them, but needed someone who could help them blaze their own trails to advocate issues that were concerning to them, to get justice from institutions that didn't always listen.

From working with high school students, to starting an environmental club, to partnering with the River Terrace community on a groundbreaking cancer survey, Julie brought deep listening and respect to the work. I think some of the elders in the communities thought of Julie as a child or grandchild of their own. Hearing her talk about "Mr. Gurley" and "Miss Wanda" with clear affection demonstrated her connection that went beyond just her job.

Compassion, listening, respect, acceptance of people for who they are – these, combined with a drive to help people discover their own power, make Julie a powerhouse in an unlikely package, and a model for us all as we strive to make the world a better place for everyone.

Gwyn Jones  
Former Chapter Chair, Sierra Club Washington, DC Chapter  
Sierra Club Grassroots Network Director  
March 2026

## Interview History

Julie Popper's oral history interview represents a significant contribution to the historical record of the Sierra Club's Environmental Justice Program. Popper was among the program's earliest hires, stepping into a newly created position as an Environmental Justice Organizer, a role that would evolve substantially during her two-year tenure. This interview explores Popper's experiences working primarily in Washington, DC's Anacostia neighborhood, a historically Black community. When selecting interview candidates, our goal was to identify individuals eager to reflect on their time at the Club and to illuminate how the organization was engaging with environmental justice during its formative years.

While reviewing the Colby Library's collection of the Environmental Justice Program's newsletter, the EJ Times, I came across the name "Julie Eisenhardt." In the newsletter, Eisenhardt appears as a young, energetic organizer deeply committed to the principles of community-based environmental justice. Her work in Washington, DC, and specifically in Anacostia, immediately stood out to me, and I knew her story would be an important one to document. I began my search for her under this name, combing through online archives, newspaper databases, and LinkedIn. Clues suggested that Julie had a background in labor organizing, and was originally from Wisconsin. Eventually, my search led me to a "Julie Popper" based in Seattle, Washington. I reached out by email, and to my delight, received an immediate, warm, and enthusiastic response. Julie was genuinely eager to participate and create an oral history interview together for the Sierra Club's Colby Library.

Corresponding over email, we shared materials from our library collections and coordinating our first meeting. Our initial video call in July 2025 served as an informal introduction to the program and its goals. Rather than diving directly into the interview, our conversation turned toward her memories of the Sierra Club. Julie proved to be an exceptional storyteller. She's attentive to names, details, and setting the scene.

Julie walked me through a series of campaigns and projects, emphasizing the local geography and its significance. Using maps of Washington, DC, she pointed out important landmarks, tracing the path of the Anacostia River and identifying military and federal facilities that fenced and divided the area. She described the persistent community opposition to polluting development such as trash transfer stations, a mental institution, and other unwanted land uses that were disproportionately threatening the environmental health and quality of life in the neighborhood.

In September 2025, we conducted Julie's oral history interview online over Zoom. She began by sharing stories of her family's involvement in union and labor organizing, experiences that deeply shaped her values and commitment to collective action. Throughout her life, she has been drawn to direct action, whether organizing against industrial waste sites or advocating for a recycling program in her high school. Her narrative reveals a consistent dedication to progressive causes and to envisioning a different, and better world.

Our conversation explored her initial impressions of joining one of the nation's largest and most established environmental organizations, and how the early Environmental Justice Program fit

within that broader structure. Despite the Sierra Club’s size and reach, Julie emphasized that the program’s work was grounded in the needs of specific marginalized communities. Her role centered on building relationships in Anacostia rather than with the Sierra Club’s Washington DC Chapter, an important distinction that underscores how the program functioned within the organization’s framework. Because her position was new and relatively undefined, Julie had the freedom to shape its responsibilities, developing her own model of community-based environmental justice organizing. Throughout the interview, she recalled hosting neighborhood workshops, collaborating with local associations and ensuring that Sierra Club provided resources to assist the community in organizing against environmental injustices.

Julie’s “listening first” and “leading with love” approach was influenced by several key figures in the Environmental Justice Program, including Jim Price, John McCown, Rita Harris, and Rhonda Anderson. She spoke particularly about Jim Price and how their conversations helped shape her understanding that environmental justice is, at its core, people-centered. More than 20 years later, we invited Gwyn Jones to contribute an introduction to the oral history, in which she reflects on Julie’s role in introducing this environmental justice–informed framework during her time in Washington, DC, alongside other important early environmental justice efforts within the Sierra Club. In many ways, this introduction exemplifies one of the oral history program’s deeper aims, which is not only to document the past, but also to foster and rekindle relationships and friendships among those working together to advance the cause of environmental justice.

Cailee Beltran  
Oral History Associate  
Sierra Club–William E. Colby Library  
December 2025

## Project History

Since 1970, the Sierra Club has collaborated with the Oral History Center (formerly the Regional Oral History Office) at the University of California–Berkeley, in collecting interviews from devoted leaders, volunteers, and contributors of the Sierra Club. For more information about the *Sierra Club Oral History Project* and to view transcripts, visit the following webpage.

<https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center/projects/sierra-club>

In 2019, the Sierra Club’s William E. Colby Memorial Library embarked on a new oral history program, known as the *Sierra Club Library Oral History Project*, to complement those created by the Oral History Center. These interviews and administrative work were performed by Sierra Club library staff with a goal of expanding the oral history collection, by acquiring shorter, focused narratives of Sierra Club champions, to be compiled into subject-based collections. This interview is part of this project. These oral histories can be obtained by contacting the Colby Library or may be viewed online on the following webpage.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/library/oral-histories>

Therese Dunn  
Sierra Club–William E. Colby Library  
Senior Librarian  
September 2025

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- Cailee Beltran: Hello, my name is Cailee Beltran. I'm the Oral History Associate for the Sierra Club's William E. Colby Library. Today is Tuesday, September 9th, 2025, and I'm conducting this interview remotely from my home in El Paso, Texas. Today, I'm speaking with Julie Popper, who is joining remotely from her home in Seattle, Washington. Hi, Julie.
- Julie Popper: Hi.
- Cailee Beltran: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today, and I hope to learn more about you and your time with the Sierra Club as well as hopefully revisit some of your memories and recollections from that time.
- Julie Popper: Sounds good.
- Cailee Beltran: How about we start at the beginning? Can you please state your full name and when and where you were born and raised?
- Julie Popper: Mm-hmm. My name is Julie Popper [April 26th, 1978]. I was born as Julie Eisenhardt. I was born in the late '70s. I don't know if you need an exact year, but it's a long time ago in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I lived in Wisconsin until I graduated college from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1999.
- Cailee Beltran: Can you tell me a little bit about your hometown and maybe how you would describe Milwaukee to folks that aren't familiar with the area?
- Julie Popper: Yeah. Milwaukee is an affordable town that is very diverse and very segregated. It's a town with roots in organized labor. It's a town that has had the only socialist mayor in the country, but at the same time it's a town that is surrounded by very red [Republican] areas, so lots of sort of culture clash. A lot of folks are really trying to make a better life for themselves in the city at a time when not everyone values the same things.
- Cailee Beltran: Hmm. What about your parents? What did your parents do? Who are they and what are their names?
- Julie Popper: Yeah, my parents are Greg and Christy Eisenhardt. They are still there. They're in a suburb of Milwaukee. My Dad is an IBEW Union [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] electrical worker and worked for our family business for the longest time. My Mom was a stay-at-home mom, but she graduated from the University of Wisconsin at a time when classes were canceled because of the amount of protests going on over the Vietnam War and over civil rights issues. I was pretty much what folks call a red diaper baby. I grew up in an activist household.

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- Cailee Beltran: What's a red diaper baby?
- Julie Popper: It's the idea that when you're born into a leftist family that you are just kind of raised into it.
- Cailee Beltran: Hmm. That's so interesting. Did you come from a big family? Do you have any siblings?
- Julie Popper: I have an older sister and a younger brother. They're still in Milwaukee. My sister's a nurse at the VA [US Department of Veterans Affairs]. Good union work. My little brother is an engineer.
- Cailee Beltran: Hmm, and where are you in the lineup of siblings?
- Julie Popper: I'm smack in the middle, middle child.
- Cailee Beltran: Let's talk a little bit about your childhood. I'm really interested in hearing more about you being a kid and growing up with parents that were involved in organizing. What was that like?
- Julie Popper: Well, I laugh because I spent a bit of time playing pool in the IBEW Union Hall because that's the thing you do. My folks were plugged into politics and issues. My Dad has always been a Republican. It's so funny because I was just out door-knocking for a mayoral candidate here in Seattle this weekend, and I was paired with someone who was new at canvassing. We knocked on the door and we talked to one person from our list, but not the other person. He's like, "Well, the wife said that she was going to vote for this candidate also. We can just mark her, right?"
- I said, "No, no, no, no, no. For the longest time my Dad thought my Mom was a Republican, too, and didn't realize that she was voting Democrat. As a kid, I was always brought into the voting booth and watched my Mom vote, and knew what was going on. She would lie about it to my Dad and say, "Oh yeah, I totally voted Republican." When he finally found out, he used to make jokes about hiding her keys because then she couldn't drive to the voting place. Yeah, I mean, it was a fairly divided household, but my Mom always spent more time with us kids and sort of set the pace around what's right and what's not right. She wasn't afraid to say things like, "Oh, your Dad says this, but we know." That was kind of fun.
- Cailee Beltran: It makes me curious, what kind of kid were you? What was your personality like as a kid? Was it extroverted? Was it introverted?
- Julie Popper: That's a really good question. I was always one of the fringe kids. I was involved in clubs, but they were like the environmental club or like stage

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crew. I always had a group of friends, but I was never in sort of mainstream popular folks. Yeah.

Cailee Beltran: Okay, so you're in Wisconsin and you're being exposed very early on to labor organizing and you're also this really cool alternative kid it sounds like. What about your education? What did you do in college and how did this inform your education?

Julie Popper: I went to the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and we used to joke that we'd have a 1:00 PM protest every day in front of the library. My friends and I, who are all in different activist groups, would always fight over who got the Tuesday and the Thursday slot, because you can't have two [groups protesting] at once. College is really where I learned the sort of trade that I do now. I was involved in Students for Tammy Baldwin [US Senator, D-WI], the first time that she ran to be a member of Congress. The way we helped the first-elected out-lesbian get there was by taking every single dorm at the University of Wisconsin, dividing the floors up and having floor captains, and just really carefully mapping who the voters were, making sure they were getting out to vote, and running a really tight program. That was organizing 101 for me.

Then, when we used to have protests over this, that, or the other thing. There was a lot going on, as always. We used to write press advisories and press releases; my extracurriculars in college taught me how to do all of that. I was studying for a degree in medieval history. When I graduated, I applied for public policy school, I applied for law school, and I applied for a PhD track medieval history graduate school program, because I had no idea what to do with my life. I ended up going to Johns Hopkins—which is a very, very different place than the University of Wisconsin—and I was there to get a PhD in Medieval History.

The students had already started a Student Labor Action Committee [SLAC] that was working on raising wages for the workers at Johns Hopkins. I had just been involved in a sit-in against sweatshop labor at the University of Wisconsin, and I had this tool kit of how to plan a campaign, how to build out your escalation, how to organize more people into what you're doing, and how to move them up a leadership ladder. All of this was how UW Madison worked, but it's not how Johns Hopkins works. I brought that in, started working with the student group, and eventually we had a sit-in that lasted, golly, I want to say 10 days. Personally, the result for me was the administration was not that happy that they were funding my studies while I was sitting in their administration building. So they cut my funding and that was the end of my graduate school career at Johns Hopkins. Lasted until April.

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Cailee Beltran: Hmm, so you have this big experience, of organizing this sit-in, leading and creating the structure, for this to happen. This wasn't exactly lining up with the academic work of a history PhD program. What were your thoughts at that moment? Did you feel a push and pull between these two worlds, and maybe you were leaning into one a little bit more than the other?

Julie Popper: Yeah, I mean, I definitely was more committed to the activist work I was doing, and the academic work was more just like interesting brain puzzles, if you will. I think part of the problem is when you go into the career center, no one says, "Oh, well you can do that for a living," when you talk about being an organizer. That's not a career path that anyone offers you, so I had never imagined it was something I could do. I always thought this is what we do in our spare time, so the idea of being an organizer for a career was totally new to me.

Cailee Beltran: That's interesting. I wanted to ask what your earliest memory of being an organizer was. It sounds like you had already been in this role before you even registered that it was a role. Is that correct?

Julie Popper: Yeah. I mean, I remember in high school... My high school wasn't recycling paper, and this sounds like such a basic thing, but back in the early '90s it was a big deal. So, we organized in my high school and got them to start recycling paper in the high school. But it was the same thing, figuring out who the decision-maker was, who has access to the decision-maker. Hats off to Mr. Brown, who was my AP history teacher. He was a disgruntled Vietnam vet who taught us AP US history out of the Howard Zinn books. [See, for example, *The People's History of the United States*, 1980.] He was the one that was the advisor to our club that helped us kind of map out how to work through the school's power structure, how to put up posters, and get more kids involved. He definitely had an organizing brain and I kind of credit him with a lot of where I ended up, because he made everything seem possible.

Cailee Beltran: I love that term, "the organizing brain," because it's such a specific personality, and it's often what we need. We need a brain like that to get us moving, to build momentum, so I just love that term. I'm curious to gauge where you were in organizing at this point. I know it wasn't entirely environmental, or about environmentalism. It sounds like it intersects with a bunch of different concerns. What were some of the causes or movements that you were more committed to prior to coming to Sierra Club?

Julie Popper: Yeah, I mean, the biggest thing for me later in college and in grad school was student labor solidarity. It was thinking about how as a student who

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pays tuition, what power do I have in the university that can help the workers in this space get better wages and benefits, and have access to the things they need to have a great life? I think it's natural because growing up in a labor household and knowing what having a good contract means, but all of these intersections are things that that student labor coalition went deep into, particularly in Baltimore [MD].

Baltimore has an organization called BUILD that is a community faith alliance that does a lot of sort of Saul Alinsky ground-up work in neighborhoods. [Saul Alinsky was an American community activist and political theorist, commonly known as the founder of community organizing.] There was also a very powerful ACORN group there; R.I.P. ACORN. I thought they were fantastic, but seeing those intersections and knowing how you talk to people about something like recycling, and they're like, "Well, I don't have time to worry about that. I need to be able to afford my rent." Then, when you talk about affordable housing, folks are like, "Well, maybe the issue isn't the cost of housing, maybe it's how much we earn." Then, you talk about labor, so it all kind of piles on top of each other.

- Cailee Beltran: Oh, definitely. Do you remember what BUILD stands for, like the acronym?
- Julie Popper: Baltimore United in Leadership Development. I'm pretty sure about that one.
- Cailee Beltran: I'm familiar with ACORN. It sounds like ACORN was at the scene for a lot of grassroots organizing, like very early environmental grassroots organizing, so it's nice to hear them come up again in other interviews.
- Julie Popper: A lot of my friends worked for ACORN. They were the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, and they really just went door to door through neighborhoods, encouraged folks to join ACORN, and they took on whatever issue the neighborhood was feeling. It's a really cool model because it is sort of like the Sierra Club's EJ [environmental justice] program. It is about meeting people where they're at, understanding people, knowing what their problems are and what the solutions are, and they just need the tools and resources to get to those solutions.
- Cailee Beltran: That's a nice segue. I'm curious about how you mentioned how labor organizing intersects in all these different ways and almost creates layers. I'm interested in hearing what led you to environmental justice work or environmental justice interests that you found yourself exploring in your organizing.

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Julie Popper: Well, it's something that BUILD did some work on and was very apparent in Baltimore, as it is in most cities in our country. You can see the polluting facilities popping up all through the lowest income neighborhoods and through the neighborhoods where particularly Black people live, not just all people of color. It's really generally specific to African-Americans.

Clean air and clean water are vital. If you're going to live, you have to breathe and drink water, and the fact that we're systematically denying that access to a single group of people based on their skin color, of course, is something that I feel very strongly about. It's just one of the many ways that capitalism and racism work together to keep the terrible system we have right now in place and to reinforce power where it is and keep power from other people. It's something I'm really passionate about.

Cailee Beltran: I'm wondering how you came to the Sierra Club? It sounds like you did have leftist principles and beliefs, and I'd like to hear about your first impressions of Sierra Club as an organization, and their reputation.

Julie Popper: Yeah, I mean, like a lot of people, I never thought it was an organization for me. My impression was that it was for wealthy suburbanites, and for folks that went backpacking every weekend and took big trips to cool places. Honestly, the first time I had contact with the EJ program was when I saw the job listing and I talked to a few folks about what it was and what it was about. Part of what attracted me is that, at the same time it was building a program in the community, it was also building change inside the organization. I think both with EJ and with so many other issues, part of what we face is the nonprofit industrial complex, if you will. [The term "nonprofit industrial complex" was coined by INCITE!, a collective of radical feminists of color, to explain how nonprofits function to professionalize organizing and model themselves after capitalist structures rather than challenge them.]

It's that the largest, most powerful organizations—the organizations that can knock on doors and get inside in Washington, DC, and our state capitals—are not organizations that are representative of our whole communities. The idea that Jim [Price] and John [McCown] were working nationally with folks like Phaedra [Pezzullo] to change this, to use part of the privilege that this organization has to address a broader spectrum of issues felt by a broader group of our community, that was something I felt really passionate about.

Cailee Beltran: I'd love to get more into that, and I have so many questions asking about what it was like being a part of the very early skeleton and structure of the [Sierra Club's] Environmental Justice Program, especially when they were

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first trying to find their footing in this massive nonprofit. I'm also curious about the logistics. How did you discover the job posting? What did the position look like or how was it advertised?

Julie Popper: Well, that's a really good question. I can't say I completely remember. It was 2000, so 25 years ago, and as much as I want to say, "Oh, I found it online," who knows? Maybe we used newspapers then. Hard to tell, but it's something I had conversations with people about. I knew folks that were working for a variety of organizations in Washington, DC, and by that point, like in January, I had moved to DC and I was taking the commuter train back to Baltimore to go to Johns Hopkins.

My social group was all folks working at DC nonprofits. I was dating someone at the time that worked for an environmental nonprofit, so he might have been the one who introduced me. I don't really remember, but again, if I saw a job at the Sierra Club, I probably would have kept looking and not thought twice about it. It was the specific sort of internal organizing along with external organizing that I thought was just really a cool concept.

Cailee Beltran: I'm thinking about your background in student movements and labor and those can be fairly radical, so I'm curious, hearing about your experience coming to work for this massive nonprofit institution. It's been around since the National Parks were established, and so I'm wondering how that compares to some of the work that you had been doing up until that point. I just want to know a little bit more about how you approached environmental justice, knowing this about the Sierra Club.

Julie Popper: Well, I was really grateful when they created the position. The manager was based out of the northern Virginia office, and one of the things they wanted was to establish an office in the community. That created physical distance between me and the organization representative. Then, I was working primarily with folks who were in DC, who really believed in the program.

I had a lot of space to establish and build a coalition, to identify community leadership and meet with those leaders to see what they were looking for, and to door-knock through neighborhoods and talk to people. When it came to the day-to-day program on the ground, I feel like there was enough space between that program and the traditional Sierra Club that we, as a community, could do what needed to be done. I don't feel like the traditional Sierra Club ever really interfered with the way that the EJ program believed in doing the work.

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Cailee Beltran: I'm curious to hear what life was like in DC, and maybe what folks you were helping out. What were the communities that you were working with?

Julie Popper: Well, DC is, like so many other cities, extremely segregated. One of the biggest dividing lines is the Anacostia River. Everyone knows DC for the Potomac [River], and the Potomac, of course... They cleaned it up and put parks along it and made everything fancy.

But the Anacostia River, at the time, was not fishable or swimmable. East of the Anacostia in Washington is Northeast DC, Southeast DC, and a little bit of Southwest DC [east of the river includes parts of NE, SE, and SW.] It is a heavily Black community, much of it was low-income. And it's also where all of the physical plants—the water filtration and the trash, like, all of the negative facilities that DC needed to survive—were sited, east of the Anacostia.

So living in DC, it doesn't take long to figure out that that's how things were structured. DC itself has a city council that is pretty accessible, and it made it possible to have conversations about these things, to build the power in a way that city council would be responsive. So it was a place where if you built something, it was possible to create change.

Cailee Beltran: So what were some of the ways that you were plugging into this community? Because you're not from DC, right? You're from Wisconsin.

Julie Popper: Right.

Cailee Beltran: So, what were the ways that you were connecting with the people there, with the neighborhoods? What did that look like?

Julie Popper: Well, one of the principles of the EJ program, and EJ as a whole, is you have to respect community leadership when it's there, but you have to find those leaders. Folks that live there know who they are, and know how to fight them. So, the community partner that was involved in founding the position and the program in DC, Eugene DeWitt Kinlow, started introducing me around. [Eugene DeWitt Kinlow is an African-American government relations consultant from Anacostia, DC who worked on various campaigns and community organizing projects related to prisons, development, and environmental justice.]

Then I met the folks he knew, people like Phil Parnell, who was involved with Marion Barry, the mayor for the longest time, and kind of knew the movers and shakers more on the local politics side. And then we met folks like the chair of the Anacostia Garden Club. They had this really cool

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program where they taught people how to use recycled tires to make planters for their front yards. So you would go around the neighborhoods and you would see these planters that were so cool, but it had this huge visual impact on the community.

The other thing that was unique to DC is they had advisory neighborhood commissions, ANCs. So when you go to vote, you vote for your mayor and your city council member, but you also vote for your ANC commissioner. That meant that on sort of a micro-neighborhood level, folks had elected their own leaders who had some little bit of power in the DC government.

Some people argue that the ANCs were a way to co-opt neighborhood organizing into a more official framework. I could see that being true. I could also see that it made it possible for them to get a budget to do what they needed to do in their neighborhood, a very limited budget. So I met a lot of those ANC commissioners and talked to them about what they were trying to get done. I went to the ANC meetings where I met some of the folks who showed up, things like that.

And then I went door to door in a few of the communities that had identified they had major issues they wanted to fight.

Cailee Beltran: So it sounds like your position already was set up to be in partnership with the organizing that was already happening in these DC neighborhoods.

What was your experience, though, first coming into the position? Were you told, "These are the neighborhoods you're assigned to, and you're going to serve these neighborhoods?" Or was it more freeform? Like, "These are my concerns, interests, or things I care about, and they line up with these issues." What was it like, do you remember?

Julie Popper: Yeah. So when they wrote the—I want to call it a grant, but—when they proposed having the position there to the Sierra Club, Eugene DeWitt Kinlow was the partner in the position, and they were pretty specific about issues east of the Anacostia.

That kind of narrowed it down, but they didn't say which issues in particular. And one of the principles of the program is that people know what their problems are, and they know what the solutions are. So it was more about listening than talking.

And you know, honestly, I look like the Sierra Club, right? [Julie is white.] And when I would show up, it was very clear that I'm not from the community. The approach I would take would be to say, "This is a

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program that is meant to bring some of the vast resources of the Sierra Club to assist you in the issues you identify, and to just help add more tools in your toolkit to help you win."

And I think, you know, of course, people are very skeptical of that. When you're in a community, it's not unusual to have just wave after wave of organizers or groups come through and make promises and then disappear. But I think when we started resourcing the groups that said they had an issue, and they wanted us to take it on, I think it really built credibility.

Cailee Beltran: I was going to ask about that because it sounds like you needed to build trust with them first. They wanted the position, but ultimately, it was kind of your lift to come to them and say, "Hey, we have these resources, and we want to share them with you." That's kind of the model of the EJ program from my own research, and that's the way it works best, it sounds like?

Julie Popper: Yeah. I mean, we would not be successful if we showed up in a community and said, "This is the thing you have to fight for." And particularly in communities of color and low-income communities, there are so many issues that folks face every single day that it wouldn't work, right? We're there to help lift up their issues and their organizing, and it's the way it should be.

Cailee Beltran: This is a good place to start at the beginning. I want to hear about some of the first projects that you worked on since being newly hired, and what do you remember about these projects? I have a few names, but maybe you can highlight the big things you worked on first.

Julie Popper: Well, I mean, the first project was to establish an office. It was kind of daunting, because part of genuinely supporting the community means not renting an office in a building owned by a landlord who was doing negative things for the community. It meant trying to find a way to make that [space] an additional support to the community, that the rent we paid was going to be staying in the place that we cared about.

So I had conversations, like I said, with leaders across the board. I really enjoy interfaith organizing. It's something that I've done for 25 years now, and it's something I did at John Hopkins and at the University of Wisconsin. So there were lots of conversations with folks where I would just introduce myself, talk about what the program is and ask, "I'm looking to rent a space for a small office. Do you know anywhere?"

The president of the Anacostia Garden Club said, "Well, we were thinking of renting a space in a Sunday school room in a church that is right by the

Anacostia Metro Station." And she said, "Would you want to share?" And I said, "Well, yeah, of course. I'd love to share with you. That'd be fantastic."

And so we actually—because they didn't have a huge budget—Sierra Club paid the rent for a small second-story Sunday school room in the annex to the Campbell AME [African Methodist Episcopal] Church, and we split it with the Anacostia Garden Club. They weren't there very often, but it was wonderful when they were there. I set it up with a computer and coffee maker, and that was that.

Cailee Beltran: I love this story. It's so charming to hear. It's very grassroots. And the interfaith organizing is always so interesting too, because it's almost inextricably tied to Black and African American communities like that in neighborhoods. I also just love that you found the location just through someone knowing the right place and being friendly to one another. It's a very charming story.

So you have the office set up, and that was the first big task. What came after that?

Julie Popper: I started just meeting with people, and then they would recommend the next group of people. So it was just a lot of individual meetings and listening, and just trying to informally find a map of where leadership lied, and also sort of what issues were arising.

One of the first issues we identified was working with one of the ANCs. They heard that a trash transfer station was coming within a few blocks of where this high-rise, low-income development was in Southwest DC. And it was clear that it was something folks were really fired up about. It was going to bring trash, smells, noise, and diesel fumes in an area that was already just across the river from the airport and up the hill from the water filtration plant. So it was a great opportunity to say, "How can we help you out with what you're doing?"

That took so many different forms. For example, there was a woman in a development they called the Pie Lady, and they wanted the Pie Lady to cater all of their evening meetings so that folks could come and have pies. So we were happy to support the Pie Lady. Don't tell anyone that she probably didn't have a certified kitchen. Not a problem at all, because, I mean, it's community-based stuff, right? She was a fantastic baker.

And, if they [community members] wanted to show up for a hearing at city council, to get from far Southwest to city council on public transit, you would have to take a bus for about 45 minutes, and then get on the

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metro, and then change trains. That was like an hour and 15 minutes, so we rented a bus for them.

And, if they [community members] wanted to raise the profile of the issue city-wide, we'd help them write a press release and do a press conference in front of their building. So again, just trying to build out the toolbox and have the resources to help them do what they were going to do anyway.

Cailee Beltran: What were the main concerns of the trash station being built? Because I know you had mentioned earlier that the Anacostia River already wasn't being cleaned up, and now this trash transfer station was being built. Also, I want to know a little bit more about the neighborhood that it was going to affect and the people who were going to be most impacted.

Julie Popper: Yeah. So the area it was going to, it was called Blue Plains. Blue Plains was just—and is still—the dumping ground for Washington. There's a military base that's right there on the river that is completely walled off. The community has no access to it. It had a commissary in it that was the most affordable and only source of groceries in this part of town. But you had to have some ties to the military to get into the commissary. The Pie Lady had a way in, but I didn't know anyone else who had a way into the commissary.

Then south of there, there was just everything you could imagine a city could dump. There was a police training facility. There was, like I said, the water filtration plant for pretty much all of DC was right there. There was a tow lot. If your car got ticketed and towed out of a city parking area, you were towed down to Blue Plains.

It was just this very detached from the community and very just filled with all the things no one wanted to look at. So, of course, the city was like, "Oh, let's just put the trash transfer station there. No one will notice. We already got other [unpleasant] stuff there."

But to the community... There are two ways into Blue Plains. One is off of the freeway that runs along the Anacostia, and the other was right in front of this building. The development is like an H-shaped building. The front has high-rise apartments, and behind it there are mid-rise buildings that have a duplex sort of set-up. They accepted Section 8 vouchers [a federal program that provides rental assistance]. It was low-income. Folks lived there because it was a lot cheaper than living in other parts of DC.

So it was a Black community that was lower income. There were lots of kids living there, kids playing in front of the building. And then you had this road that went straight down to Blue Plains that the tow trucks would

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go down. They were proposing that lots and lots of trash trucks would go down it. So it was pretty clear what needed to happen there.

Cailee Beltran: So the community did not want this trash transfer station. What were the solutions to it? It sounds like not only just stopping it. Were there other suggestions or recommendations on what to do with the land?

Julie Popper: Yeah. I mean, the community wanted access to a park. There were a lot of kids. There were a lot of folks that liked to go for a walk. They would just like some space that did not have a negative impact on their quality of life, that didn't pollute the water and the air, and had access to some of the same resources that other parts of the city had.

Cailee Beltran: I'm curious now to hear about how the Sierra Club was receiving this kind of organizing and supporting a cause like this. Because historically, we've kind of only focused on protecting public lands, wilderness, conservation-related issues. So this is definitely a step in a different direction, I think.

Julie Popper: Yeah. Well, I think the two leaders I worked with most were Jim Dougherty and his wife Gwyn. They partnered with Eugene DeWitt Kinlow to get the position there. They knew what they were signing up for. They believed in it. So when it was clear this was a community priority, I think they understood that it's the direction we had to go.

Then there were the rest of the DC members. From day one, every time there was a DC newsletter [*Capital Sierran*], I would write something about what was going on in the community, about the fight we had, encouraging people [Sierra Club members] to come out to the press conference, come out to the city hall hearing, come to an ANC meeting, and no one ever came. It was really, really hard, if not impossible, to tie those communities together because they were geographically really separated. That's not what they did in the Sierra Club, was to stand up with communities.

So in that way, the idea of marrying the community issues to the Sierra Club activists didn't really work. But the good news was that it also didn't hamper the work. We didn't have people in the chapter saying, "Oh, we shouldn't be doing this," or "Why are we spending the money this way?" And if we did, I didn't hear about it. Maybe Jim and Gwyn heard about it, but I didn't.

Cailee Beltran: I'm really curious to see how the environmental justice program looked at this point. What was that culture like? Because it was kind of its own microcosm within this giant web and organization.

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Julie Popper: Yeah. I mean, it *was* its own microcosm, just as you said. I think Jim [Price] and John [McCown] sort of set the pace for the EJ organizers being a support network for each other. And Rita [Harris] and Rhonda [Anderson] had been hired before me. Rita was in Atlanta, and Rhonda was in Detroit. And was she in Atlanta?

Cailee Beltran: Rhonda is in Detroit, and Rita was in Memphis.

Julie Popper: Well, Rita and Rhonda both were hired the way it was supposed to work. They were from the communities they were working in. So I kind of stuck out being a non-community hire when it was supposed to be a community hire. We would get together from time to time, and we would try to do it on the cheap.

This is kind of a funny story, but we would have EJ team meetings, and at one point someone said, "We should get together in person." We didn't have that much budget. So we looked around at the cheapest place for all of us to meet up, and it ended up being St. Louis. No one was in St. Louis, but we were like, "Okay, we'll go to St. Louis. It's the cheapest place for all of us to fly into. All right. Cool."

We looked for the cheapest hotel we could get, and it was like a Ramada Inn that was kind of close to the river, and it looked like a good idea. And they had a meeting room that was super cheap, too.

We got there and it was *terrible*, and Rita was like, "I can't stay there." But we had already paid for the meeting rooms. So John said, "Yeah, I don't think we should stay here." So we moved to the Holiday Inn that was a few blocks away, and it was slightly more expensive, but also more livable.

We still had to go back to the Ramada for the meetings. We had ordered snacks for our meetings, as one does, but again, budget constraints. We showed up and the continental breakfast was these mini muffins that they had just arranged on a plate and put Saran Wrap over. And it was like they had just opened those little bags of mini muffins and poured them out on a plate and just set them all up. It was just really funny.

But that was kind of the shoestring we were living on. We knew we needed each other. We knew we had a fight inside the Club, and we had our own fights that we were fighting in our communities. Getting together was just so important. And I think it meant more to Rita and Rhonda because they had been at the fight longer, and they had more clashes with their local chapters than I had. But it took all of us together to sort of hold the line on the principles of what we were trying to do.

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Cailee Beltran: I am so happy you brought that up because I knew that you all would get together as an EJ program and have these meetings, and it just sounds really amazing to be able to come from all parts of the country and put your brains together, because everyone has this one thing in common and it's representing or serving these communities. So what better place to bounce ideas and brainstorm and relate to one another and connect than in a program like that? So it was Rita Harris, Rhonda Anderson. Any other names coming up or was it just you all?

Julie Popper: Jim and John were there, but the three of us were the first hires and over the next two years, they hired an Appalachian organizer. They hired a Borderlands' organizer.

Cailee Beltran: Was Robert Tohe hired yet, or not yet?

Julie Popper: He was hired while I was still there. Yeah. I think they hired someone in Cancer Alley?

Cailee Beltran: Yes. Darryl Malek-Wiley.

Julie Popper: Yes. That was just before I left, I think. Yeah. It was the few and the brave at the very beginning.

Cailee Beltran: Absolutely. So I thought that all these people had already been hired when you were brought on. But you were genuinely a part of the skeleton of this project. That was kind of ambitious in this organization. Were you a part of developing what the program looked like?

Julie Popper: That's a really good question. I was not one of the founders that developed the program initially. I tip my hat to those folks because it was so thoughtfully built that you had to apply with a community partner in mind. So it was almost like screened from the beginning, but there was some rooted in the community piece to every program. [The proposed program sites were screened for having a community connection before they were approved.] I did build the DC program in its infancy, and then all of us took responsibility for thinking about and taking action for the internal Sierra Club organizing. You know, at times it felt like a fight for our life.

After 2001, funding went down. There was the dot-com burst, and even wealthy people who had money [were affected], so less money was going to the Club and there were concerns about what was going to be cut. We had conversations about if this person or that person was elected president, we'd be in a very different situation for this program. So nothing was taken for granted. We were always making sure that our program was in front of as many members as possible so that they saw the work we were

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doing was visible, so it was more likely to be embraced. Then having those conversations with leadership about the importance of what we were doing.

Cailee Beltran: There are records of the board and leadership talking about the EJ program, and I think I remember seeing something from Kim DeFeo listing all of these accomplishments and wins. You mentioned that you set up the program in DC. I just want to highlight what some of the successes of the program were, but also maybe you could talk about the challenges of the program too.

Julie Popper: Yeah. There were things that were clear successes. We did stop that trash transfer station from coming into Blue Plains. We did get the city to have a conversation with the community about the Anacostia River. There was a riverkeeper already there. [Riverkeepers is a national program that establishes organizations focused on healthy, clean, swimmable and fishable rivers.] So we were again, supporting something that was already happening. We had a lot of conversations about redevelopment at the St. Elizabeth's property, and worked to help the community understand what the process was so that they could plug in where it made sense. I think both doing a lot of education about environmental justice issues with the DC chapter members, and then also doing that internal work in the bigger Sierra Club.

Cailee Beltran: What was it like coming to DC membership and presenting these concerns or issues that they should care about?

Julie Popper: Again, I think that because Jim and Gwyn as the leaders in the chapter and also Dan Emmanuel who was really into urban planning, the three of them were insulating. I think they, as leaders, said, "This is what we're doing," and I would say, "This is what it looks like on the ground." But I feel like in the leadership, there was not much pushback. I feel like they had accepted it and fully bought into it before they applied to have a program there. So I didn't feel a ton of resistance. I feel like there was a lot of acceptance.

I think one of the biggest struggles we had was that the community partner, Eugene DeWitt Kinlow—a fantastic person, very plugged into the community—was also of a different social class than a lot of the folks I ended up working with. When I started branching out and meeting with leaders he recommended, they were folks who had college degrees or were well established. It wasn't folks who were fighting for the day-to-day. I feel like we had to build from the ground up when it came to working class folks in that neighborhood.

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Cailee Beltran: So this might be a nice way to return to the DC issues. It sounds like the leaders of the community organizing within DC were maybe more established, middle class, educated, but the folks that were actually being impacted by the environmental issues were working class, lower class. I'm wondering how you came to them and connected with them, and what it was like trying to get people to show up. How do you get working class people to show up for issues like this, specifically environmental issues? And I'm thinking about the public transportation situation and how the Sierra Club sourced the busing and the mobilization of people. I'm wondering how that experience was.

Julie Popper: Well, like I said, my first entry into the community was to say, "I'm here to provide resources for your fight," and do more listening than talking and slowly build credibility that I wasn't bringing my own agenda. I was there to back them and their fight. And then, I recognized how many hurdles are in the way when a person who does not have the privilege of car ownership, or does not have the privilege of stable child care, or does not have the privilege of working one job for 40 hours. And then having free time, people that are working multiple jobs. And also I was trying to figure out how many of those [issues] we have the resources to address.

So we can address transportation: we can get a bus. We can address child care: we can provide child care. At the meeting, we can pay a high school student from the community to be at the meeting to hang out with the kids. We can provide meals, already made boxed meals on the bus on the way to city council. But I was just trying to think of what are those things that get in the way of engagement? And there're some things we can't solve. We're not going to be able to provide lost wages for folks who have multiple jobs, or who get paid hourly and would have to take time off work. But what are the other things that we have control over, that we can help break down barriers?

Cailee Beltran: Yeah. I think engagement was the word I was looking for. It sounds like you all strategically and very successfully were able to help people engage in these issues. So you were able to get all these people to come to this hearing from the community who otherwise probably wouldn't have been able to make it. What was that experience like?

Julie Popper: I thought it was fantastic. It was really cool. We had one of those little short buses, the kind that usually are shuttles from the airport or whatever, and folks got on the bus and we went to the city council. For a lot of people, it was their first time in a city council hearing. I thought that was fantastic because it takes the first time to get to the next one. On the bus, I was briefing folks about what to expect, helping community members come up with what their testimony is going to be, and encouraging them to

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testify instead of just being there. I think it was important to them to have this access. I have no doubt if we weren't there, at least two or three of those folks would've gone anyway, but we just made it possible to put a little more oomph behind what they were doing and that felt great.

When it comes to engagement, I think part of it is not thinking of it as an environmental [issue]. Jim and John used to always talk about the "blue butterflies," and the blue butterflies are the environmental issues. This is the idea that certain environmentalists were concerned about the most precious, remote, and intangible issues. We should care about this thing because we should. And some people have the privilege to do that, and that's great. Blue butterflies are important too, but these environmental issues were health issues. They *are* [human] health issues.

And it's not just like, "Are we protecting blue butterflies?" It's like, "Can kids safely play outside or are diesel fumes going to make it so that asthma is going to be so common in this community that it's going to impact life expectancy?" When you ask the question that way, I think it's far more engaging and it's stuff that the community was already feeling. It was their issue. It's not just thinking about it as protecting lands or hugging trees, but as our kids deserve better.

Cailee Beltran: Exactly. I like that. Going to the hearing probably could have been really scary and a little anxiety-inducing, but it's nice that you had leaders, including yourself, there to walk someone through it, and ultimately encourage them to testify and speak to these issues. So people spoke at the hearing and it sounds like there was a good turnout. What happened afterwards? Was this received well? What were the next steps?

Julie Popper: Yeah. I think it was received really well. I made a mistake, in that I stood up and spoke. I should not have done that because it was the community's issue, not mine, but I wanted to throw Sierra Club support behind what was happening. So I spoke as the Sierra Club representative, but really it was their time to shine. What happened is they denied the permit for the trash transfer station there, and we had a celebration with pie, which was good. But I think it was one of those things where, as an organizer, we talk about finding an issue that's winnable, because especially as you're getting people engaged for their first time in doing this work, it's important that you win, because the last thing we want to teach someone is that when you get engaged you waste your time and you don't win. So I was really, really grateful that folks felt this deeply and widely and got engaged and showed up and made it happen for their community. They knew the problem, they knew the solution, we just had to provide some of the tools.

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Cailee Beltran: That sounds like a good win. I think in environmental justice histories and struggles, you often don't get a win. So for people's engagement to be high, and for the community to turn out in that way, and then get that win, is so big. So I'm curious to hear about what other things are going on, because the community wins this fight against the trash transfer station. It's not going to be built anymore, but now we have this land, and it sounds like people were trying to develop these neighborhoods and these communities at this point. So what happened after the trash transfer station?

Julie Popper: There was a lot going on. What was happening is the gentrification of DC was starting to bleed over to East of the Anacostia. Jim and Gwyn were both very involved in city planning issues and transportation planning. So they definitely had an issue in supporting a community that was seeing the last of their available land disappear. That was seeing what folks had hoped would become something useful to their community, not fenced off in federal. So part of what we did is develop a toolkit, a little booklet called "Movin' on up, not out!," that was helping fight gentrification. We made it available to all our community organizations and partners. It would walk folks through how the public input process worked and when to show up and things like that.

Then we tried to identify the times when something was coming up for hearing. That was the St. Elizabeth's campus. St. Elizabeth's is right there, just probably a quarter mile away from Campbell AME Church where the [Sierra Club] office was. It's fenced in and it's like this historic property of a mental health institution. The federal government decided to close it. Institutionalization, not really so much a thing as it used to be, but there were farms on the property. There were six different buildings and it was huge. They were going to redevelop it. The community was like, "We don't want this to be a fenced off federal facility. This is open space. There's so much we can do with it." So trying to tease through the crazy federal process for planning.

Then the same thing with an area called Poplar Point. Poplar Point is right on the Anacostia River, and it was controlled by the city, but the city was looking to sell it off. Again, what are these archaic processes that are so involved and complex? How can we get community voices into that in a way that has substantial power? So doing lots of anti-gentrification work.

Cailee Beltran: You mentioned Poplar Point. It sounds like a lot of these gentrification and development problems were tied to environmental issues. In my research, I think I remember reading something about there being soil pollution, and fertilizers, and pesticides in this land that make it inaccessible to the public entirely. So I'm wondering specifically about

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that case. Did you also come across it as like this is an environmental issue too?

Julie Popper: Yeah. It's an environmental issue, but more importantly it's a quality of life issue, and a health issue for the neighboring folks, right? Poplar Point is right by Barry Farm, and Barry Farm is a public housing neighborhood. It was low-rise duplexes. There was a little bit of open space involved, but it wasn't really maintained. There's a neighborhood school right there across the street from Campbell AME, and folks were saying, "We want to make sure that this stays something that our neighborhood has access to. We want it to be safe and healthy. We want our kids to have a decent playground. We don't want to be fenced off from it, and we certainly don't want it to be industrial."

So I worked with some of the folks that were with the Barry Farm Neighborhood Association, and they wanted to have a neighborhood cleanup. They were like, "We'll meet people that way, and then we can talk to them about Poplar Point." It was a great idea. The Sierra Club bought lots of gloves and rakes and things, and pies, and we supported them in doing that and the turnout wasn't that great. It was really, really hard to see. We had to have a conversation about what was going on. So we tried an evening meeting instead that didn't involve neighborhood cleanup and more folks showed up for that. That was good. Just really starting the conversation of what are you for? What do you imagine there? What's the goal? What's the thing we're fighting for instead of the thing we're fighting against?

Cailee Beltran: So what were the goals that were coming up? Do you remember what some of the solutions that people were suggesting at this point?

Julie Popper: Yeah. It's what I was just saying before, the goal was to make it an accessible space for the neighborhood. I think there was a huge and totally warranted trust gap between these communities and the DC government and certainly the federal government because for so long, whatever it was, if it was bad, it was headed to their neighborhood. So we were trying to figure out, is this something for the community? Are folks open to this? And then what's a vision that we can present for what's needed here? You know, people know what they want. They know the solution to their problems.

Cailee Beltran: So we're talking about the Barry Farm Resident Association. I just want to ask about the Southwest Hill Association. Are these two different associations or are they just in the same areas?

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- Julie Popper: No. Southwest Hill Association was also in the ANC, down by the Trash Transfer station in far Southwest. But Barry Farm was probably half an hour by bus north of there. Barry Farm, they were very afraid of gentrification because they were right across from the Anacostia Metro Station. Being near a train station is scary for affordable housing and for public housing because that makes the land worth a lot of money. So they wanted to get organized.
- Cailee Beltran: So what ended up happening with these concerns? So people were worried about this gentrification, what ended up happening there?
- Julie Popper: Well, while I was there, they approved a school to go on Poplar Point. I think it was a charter school, but they were going to put a school there, which was great. A lot of this happened after I left. Change in cities is a long-term thing, but I know they were asking for a grocery store because East of the Anacostia is a huge food desert, except for the commissary. I haven't looked at where things stand right now. I should, super curious, but I know that they were intent on organizing, and we set a good groundwork.
- Cailee Beltran: Are there any other Sierra Club supported campaigns or projects that you worked on during this time?
- Julie Popper: Yeah, one of the neighborhood leaders I identified was this gentleman named George Gurley. And George Gurley lived kind of straight east of RFK Stadium, so just over the bridge, over the Anacostia, just south of the dividing line between Northeast and Southeast. He was an original resident of the neighborhood. He was a retiree. I think it was the Near Northeast Neighborhood Association. He kept his neighborhood really well organized and they were looking for support in their fights. So they were going to site a liquid natural gas plant right next to housing and a playground. Mr. Gurley was very concerned about that. So we helped resource Mr. Gurley in that fight and also helped him go door to door and bring more people into the neighborhood association. So, his fight was one where part of it was building a bigger association so they would be stronger for the next fight.
- Cailee Beltran: I'm wondering if we're thinking about the same thing, but was there a federal scientific or health study done about this plant specifically?
- Julie Popper: That sounds like it would be.
- Cailee Beltran: I'm wondering, because I know the Sierra Club commissioned studies like that all the time. Was it the case here?

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Julie Popper: I don't think we commissioned a study. I would have to go back and look 25 years ago.

Cailee Beltran: So Sierra Club's involvement was more about mobilizing people and also funding and giving resources where they could. Did that have any good turnout or any good engagement like the previous campaigns?

Julie Popper: Yeah, I mean Mr. Gurley was very respected in that neighborhood and he was the leader that everyone supported. So when he called folks together, they would come and there was sort of a generation gap. He was a retiree, a little bit older, and he was looking to engage more with younger folks in his neighborhood, bringing more people into the neighborhood association. So we were able to help tie more folks together into that neighborhood association and mobilize more around the liquid natural gas facility. Yeah, but he was also interested in building a more sustainable neighborhood association.

Cailee Beltran: And so what was the Sierra Club's major role in this campaign?

Julie Popper: It was just resourcing and support. So again, navigating the systems that were part of the approval process. Then also, I believe we helped him send a piece of mail to all of his neighbors about what was going on. We dropped leaflets door to door about neighborhood association meetings. Pretty sure we provided pie for a few meetings.

Cailee Beltran: Got to have pie.

Julie Popper: Running theme here. I mean really just help him out with the things that he didn't already have in his toolkit.

Cailee Beltran: Okay. I found while doing some research and it is this stringing along this common theme of coalition building and engagement and getting people involved. I read that you organized a summit on the trash transfer station we previously talked about, and I just want to hear a little bit about what that was like helping set up that summit, but also if you want to speak a little bit to the importance of coalition building?

Julie Popper: Yeah. So I was working with the ANC commissioner on the Southwest Hill and our plan was to try to engage more and more people ahead of the hearing. She identified that they wanted to do more education around what it was, what the other alternatives were, and to also do some education to help people envision what else could happen there. Like what are the other options we have? So she wanted to set up a major event and then I was able to use my staff time to reach out to some of the other organizations that I had met with along the way. She reached out to other folks that she

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knew. So we tried to bring everyone into the summit, as sort of like the hub, and then from the summit turn as many people out as possible to the hearing and other things that were going on.

I think we were able to get a couple other neighborhood associations. There were a couple pastors who showed up. That's great. And then really from there, we also tried to engage with the city council member, Sandy Allen from the eighth ward, ward eight. It was pretty successful, I think, in giving people that opportunity to come out and really see what was planned. Part of the reason we had to do it is because no one from the city had taken the time to explain to the neighborhood what they had planned. This is what EJ is all about. It's, "Oh, they're not resisting, they don't have a problem with this." Well yeah, you didn't even tell them it was going to happen. So how can we also amplify the work that the city should have done in the first place to let people know that this was coming.

Cailee Beltran: Yeah, so it really was uplifting, or creating a structure so that we can uplift the voices of those that are being impacted. That's so important. Sierra Club works best in coalitions.

Julie Popper: One of the core principles of EJ—all EJ, not just the Sierra Club EJ Program—is that community leadership is already in place. We don't need to lead communities; they have their own leaders. I think that that's what coalition building is about. We don't want to take over. We also don't want to be separate. We want to build something bigger together.

Cailee Beltran: Yeah, that's very different from Sierra Club's, I guess more traditional way of showing up in their advocacy and their conservation work. I'm curious to know about the EJ Program at this point. You are fully involved and plugged into the DC sphere. What was going on towards the end of the EJ Program when you were nearing the end of your Sierra Club tenure?

Julie Popper: It was really hard, and I signed up for something hard, but I was very young and very green and it started getting very personal in a way that was just really... I mean it was hard for me, yeah. I was not of the community. I had the privilege to have the expectation that it wouldn't be so personal. But the criticism was real, that I was not of the community, and the resources that went into my position were resources that could have gone to a community person. That criticism came out more and more.

And then at the same time, they had hired a new director for our area that was based in the Northern Virginia office. Her name was Malkia M'Buzi Moore. She was just a fantastic woman to work with. She also really supported the EJ Program. And she didn't last. I'll never forget, the organizing director for the Club at the time called me and said, "I've got

some bad news." He said, "I need you to know that Malkia has left the Club." And I was really upset about that. And, someone from the community said, "You're using Sierra Club sources to support Eugene DeWitt Kinlow's candidacy for city council." I knew better; I was not using these resources to do political campaigning or to back anyone's political campaign, but I also understood that him being the primary partner in the leadership of this program didn't look good when he was running for office. Not everyone in the community supported him as their candidate. Which is the way politics always works, right?

It was kind of clear that I was a hire that I wouldn't have made. And I wasn't the right person for the job, but I could get the job started. I also [left] for personal reasons. It felt like the world was crashing down around me, but I was such a program supporter. I mean, I never got the full story of what happened there with Malkia. I'd love to hear it if you got it. Then the community really heavily questioned my work and involvement. It was just clear that it was time to make other arrangements. And then, yeah, it was sort of abrupt; I moved to Miami.

Cailee Beltran:

I think that you *did* create the foundation for the EJ Program to have a base, and office technically, but really a hub to do this work. Just as the program began to grow and take shape, I think that's just how these organizing jobs really are. They just shift and constantly look different. And so, it sounds like that's the case here—that we were able to ride this wave, of how many campaigns?, like four campaigns?—which is just massive for the tenure of an organizer. Ultimately the goal was to support, fund, and be there for communities that were trying to do this work. And that's ultimately what you did, and what Sierra Club was able to do through this position. How are your feelings now with the Sierra Club and the EJ Program specifically?

Julie Popper:

I mean, I still love the EJ Program. I love everything that it stands for. I love that it's in the communities, fighting alongside the communities, and in support of the community, rather than taking it over. I always felt like if the next hire in DC was of the community, it meant I had done a good job. I have really complicated feelings because, like I said, I was probably not the right person to hire. But when you're that green, it's not something where you're going to be like, "Oh, don't hire me." [Laughs] But I still fully support that work. I fully support what it means.

And again, it's one of those spaces of mobilizing privilege, to dismantle privilege when possible. And just the idea of using the resources, and the access, and the power the Sierra Club has to back communities, I think is the way to go.

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Cailee Beltran: Do you keep in touch with anyone from the EJ Program?

Julie Popper: I don't, but I've been fairly itinerant. [Laughs] I'm speaking to you now from Seattle. I also lived in Chicago for six years. I lived in Miami. I worked in DC for five more years. So yeah, things have been a winding road. When you first contacted me, I asked for Jim Price's contact info, and I took a week to write him a very thoughtful note about how much his leadership meant to me. I still think about what Jim taught me, about leading with love instead of anger. And Jim taught me about how people know the solution to their own problems. And Jim taught me about Miles Horton and the Highlander Center. Those are things you don't forget.

Cailee Beltran: Absolutely. The lineup of people that were a part of the early EJ Program and who established the early program was Jim Price, John McCown, Rita Harris, Rhonda Anderson, and you. So just, I think it was an exciting time too for the Club to go in that direction. As we approach concluding our interview, I want to hear a little bit about some of your accomplishments, or something you're really proud of that you were able to achieve during your time with the Club?

Julie Popper: That's a really good question. I always think the biggest and most important accomplishments are building leaders, and building strong organizations, so that you can win a fight. And the fight doesn't end, it keeps going. The fact that at one point we had almost a hundred people involved in the Southwest Hill Association, that's *huge*. And helping Barry Farm see how their leaders could engage from where they were. Those are the things, structural growth, really means a lot to me.

Cailee Beltran: I'm curious to hear about what life was like after leaving the Club. What were some of the things that you worked on that you're proud of today?

Julie Popper: So much. So part of my urgency in leaving the Club was I felt very personally driven to work a ballot initiative campaign in Miami-Dade County. We were fighting an initiative that would have taken sexual orientation out of the protected classes for housing discrimination and job discrimination. It almost sounds like it's not possible. Well, maybe it is in the last little bit. So going down [to Miami], building an interfaith coalition, and also just being part of the canvas and canvas training to make that happen was a really big deal.

I was part of helping pass the National Housing Trust Fund [a federal block grant program that provides funding to states to increase and preserve the supply of affordable housing, particularly rental housing for extremely low-income families]. I worked for two years building a coalition just across the country. And then I did some accountability

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around senators that weren't supporting the trust fund. That was really important, and that passed, and that's great.

Since then, it's been all organizing workers, and winning contracts. So, I was part of corporate social accountability campaigns that helped organize lots and lots of workers—from home care workers, to nursing home workers, to hospital workers, and now educators.

Cailee Beltran: Did your time at Sierra Club inform any of this work?

Julie Popper: Yes! Like I said, so much of it was foundational to the way I approach the work now. The biggest thing again is leading with love, not anger. It's hard to build something sustainable when you're angry at the boss instead of supporting awesome people and their awesome families, and taking that moment of pause and saying, "Why is today so hard?" It's hard because I'm not remembering the love for those people that I am trying to support, and that's just been huge for me.

Cailee Beltran: That's very sweet and charming, and I'm going to carry that with me as I continue to do these interviews and connect with other organizers. Do you have anything else you want to add or speak to?

Julie Popper: I was with the Sierra Club only two years, and I was very, very young. It was a hard fight and I didn't have the sustainability to keep going, but I also knew that someone of the community needed that position. So I'm really honored that you reached out and found me. I did some hard work, and hopefully they're still fighting strong. I trust that they are. A shout out to Rita and Rhonda too, because they stuck with it and it was, I know they had local battles that were not easy.

Cailee Beltran: I think for two years you were an incredibly accomplished organizer.

Julie Popper: Well, thank you. That's kind.

Cailee Beltran: Julie it's been such a treat to speak with you, learn about your life, and learn from you about environmental justice organizing. You're very kind and friendly, and this interview process has been a breeze. Thank you again for your time and willingness to speak with me.

Julie Popper: Of course. Thanks for reaching out.

Cailee Beltran: Okay, thank you.



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NEWSLETTER OF  
THE NEW COLUMBIA CHAPTER

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2  
SUMMER 2000

*Summer time and the livn' is easy. Just the time to get out and enjoy a lazy afternoon at the National Arboretum*

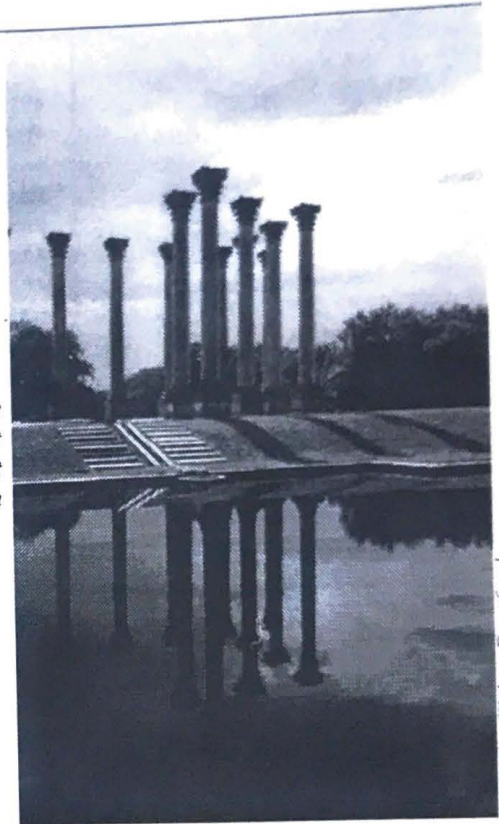


photo by Walter Dornfried

## D.C. Environmental Justice Program Launched

With the hiring in April of **Julie Eisenhardt** as our first full-time D.C.-based environmental justice (EJ) organizer, the Sierra Club has significantly increased the resources we devote to working with community partners to confront and resolve environmental injustice. Julie brings to this program enthusiastic energy, strategic organizing skills and a deep commitment to empowering communities to effectively advocate for their issues.

"I was born in Milwaukee and went

to college in Madison, Wisconsin," says Julie. "I see the same pattern of injustice repeated in city after city. When I moved to Baltimore, I saw the workers and people of color struggling with the same problems that the workers in Milwaukee had: low pay, poor environment, lack of representation, mis- and under-education, to name a few." While in Baltimore as a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, Julie helped organize a powerful alliance of labor, civic groups, faith organizations and students, united to fight for higher wages for workers. Her graduate school

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CHECK OUT OUR CHAPTER WEB SITE!  
WWW.SIERRACLUB.ORG/CHAPTERS/DC/

(All area codes are 202 unless specified)

# ISSUES

## Klinge Valley Road ... er, Park?

Following public comment on several alternatives, the Department of Public Works (DPW) is preparing an environmental assessment to be released at a yet-to-be-announced date. Alternatives presented ranged from letting the entire area revert to stream valley to developing a hiker-biker trail along the valley, to restoring the 2-lane roadway. Environmentalists, including the Sierra Club, supported the stream valley alternative with a permeable-surfaced trail. Members are urged to contact councilmembers Jim Graham and Kathy Patterson to urge their support of an environmental alternative rather than restore the roadway, which washed out in 1990. For more information, contact Jim Dougherty, 202-488-1140/jimdougherty@aol.com.

## Southeast Federal Center Initiative

About 100 community members and activists participated in two days of meetings that could help determine the future of the Southeast Federal Center and surrounding neighborhoods. With input from focus groups on development, the environment, transportation, housing, implementation, and buildings, planners and design professionals aimed to develop an ideal solution for the development of the SEFC, 55 acres of federally-owned land along the Anacostia River and adjacent to the Navy Yard. Among key environmental recommendations: addressing the combined sewage overflow problem; opening up the street grid and community access to the river; setting design guidelines that would minimize impervious surfaces, especially within the 100-year floodplain; creating a riverfront promenade that would be part of a 200-foot buffer and keep runoff from entering the river directly, rather filtering it through the ground first; identifying greenspace within the zone and developing that green space for public parks. Other initiatives included creating transportation and streetscapes that are pedestrian- and bike-friendly as well as

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The Committee on Public Works and the Environment will hold a Public Hearing on DPW's plans for the future of Klinge Valley Road

2 p.m., Wednesday, June 7  
One Judiciary Square  
Council Chamber  
441 4th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20001

To testify you must register in advance. Contact Jim Dougherty for details. Written statements are also encouraged and will be made a part of the official record if received by 5:30 p.m., Friday, June 16. Submit written statements to Ms. Phyllis Jones, Secretary to the Council, Room 716, One Judiciary Square, 441 4th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

## Oxon Cove Campaign on the Move Again

Oxon Cove activists are meeting again to continue last year's battle to protect the inlet off the Potomac River in Far Southwest D.C. Although the threat of a prison no longer seems imminent, the transfer of land from the National Park Service to Corrections Corporation of America will still likely go through as mandated by Congress, and CCA's appeal of the Zoning Commission's denial of their zoning application is still pending. Leaders are looking at various strategies to protect the Cove as well as support community initiatives for development on nearby sites, possibly D.C. Village and the impoundment lot. For more information, contact Eugene Kinlow at 202-563-3131 or kinlow@aol.com or Anna El-Eini at 202-332-4644 or eleini@foe.org.

## DPW Gas Station Threatens Anacostia River

The D.C. Department of Public Works continues construction of a gas station one block from the Anacostia River at First and O Streets, SE on public property. They have already been cited by EHA for constructing without a permit under the soil erosion control act and without an approved storm water management plan. Obvious environmental concerns are their blatant disregard of environmental permits and plan requirements and the proximity of this station to the river. First Street and the river are already inundated with gas and oil at this location, and judging by DPW's maintenance of their facilities on New Jersey Ave., there will be serious run-off issues. This is one of twelve new stations they will be building across the city. Earth Conservation Corps (ECC) is inviting people to write the Mayor, the Council and DPW to have this station stopped and have further gas station plans re-evaluated with the environment in mind. If you have questions or if you would like to visit this site please call Lara Day at ECC, phone 202-554-1960.

## SEFC

*continued from page 2*

providing shuttle links between the SEFC and other parts of the city. Of significant importance among all the initiatives was creating a plan that would not only create a vibrant area but would be sure to include and benefit the residents from the surrounding neighborhoods, which have a large proportion of public housing. For more information, contact Gwyn Jones, 202-488-0505/gwynjones@aol.com.

## Environmental Justice

*continued from page 1*

funding was cut after she organized a 17-day sit-in.

Julie spent her first weeks on the job working to expand Sierra Club alliances in Anacostia neighborhoods and to bring the Sierra Club's membership and resources closer to the community. She attended ANC meetings and civic association meetings and met one-on-one with community leaders, all the while asking the question, "How can the Sierra Club help you solve your problems?" At the community's invitation, Julie is focusing the D.C.-based EJ program work on several projects over the next few months:

**Anacostia Waterfront Initiative:** This fast-moving Williams Administration re-development initiative has not been effectively publicized in the neighborhoods that will be most directly affected by it. Julie is focusing on bringing residents into the planning process, working with them to envision their ideal neighborhood and to present that vision at community meetings and other venues as this initiative moves forward.

**Neighborhood Health Initiative:** In Ward 8D, the Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Plant and other government facilities release high amounts of pollution. Ward 8D residents are contracting upper respiratory ailments at alarming rates. We are working with neighborhood leaders to survey residents about their health, and will use the survey to help citizens organize to fight for solutions.

**Neighborhood Seminars:** People who organize have more power than those who do not. We are offering a series of neighborhood-based organizing seminars for civic associations to assist residents in envisioning solutions to their problems and developing effective action plans. We are also working with community leaders to host monthly "East of the River" seminars on a variety of issues, starting in late June with a seminar on the effects of and solutions to gentrification.

**Hands Across the City:** Finally, Julie is working to bring Sierra Club members and other community members together. "I am sending announcements of community events over e-mail to Club

members, and will hold an open house in the new office for both community and Sierra Club members. If you are interested in getting more involved with the community, please contact me," says Julie. "Together we can create environmentally just communities in D.C.!"

The National Sierra Club has made a principled commitment to work with communities that request our assistance. Atlanta-based EJ organizer John McCown has worked diligently nationwide but primarily in the Southeast over the past seven years on EJ issues. The Sierra Club soon will have a total of five full-time EJ organizers, with new organizers based Washington and three other major cities: Los Angeles, CA; Detroit, Michigan; and Memphis, Tennessee. We are working alongside traditional EJ activists and groups that have been hard at work for many years. Because industry advocates and government agencies are slow to embrace the concept of environmental justice and include neighborhood representatives in decision-making processes, there remains much work to do.

The First National People of Color Environmental Summit of 1991 brought people from around the world together to discuss environmental problems and forge a formally recognized movement for safe, healthy, sustainable neighborhoods. Numerous analyses confirm that people-of-color neighborhoods and low-income white communities are disproportionately burdened with polluting factories, hazardous waste facilities, and other undesirable land uses. Lax environmental protection and poor zoning laws have left Superfund sites, abandoned industrial sites (brownfields), and actively polluting facilities located dangerously close to homes and schools.

Environmental justice issues include reducing toxic pollution at the source, addressing related health impacts and breaking the cycle of unfair environmental policies. "Nowhere in our region are environmental justice issues more urgent than in communities along the Anacostia River in D.C.," says Chapter Conservation Chair Gwyn Jones.

At press time, details on the new EJ office were not final. In the meantime, Julie can be reached at julie.eisenhardt@sierraclub.org or 202-904-8279.

# CapitalsSierran



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APPENDIX B NEWSLETTER OF  
THE NEW COLUMBIA CHAPTER

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 4  
WINTER 2000/2001

You're invited to our  
annual Holiday Party!  
(see page 16)



*Klinge Road at crossroads:  
Parkland for all or  
shortcut for a few?*

## Klinge Valley: Park or Road?

*by Buffie Brownstein and Jim Dougherty*

More than 125 impassioned citizens packed themselves into a Department of Public Works (DPW) hearing room November 30 to debate the proposed reconstruction of a roadway through Klinge Valley. With lapel badges identifying the "roadies" and the "parkies," some 65 people spoke to the pros and cons.

Representing the Club was Jim Dougherty, who devoted his two minutes to the stream pollution that would be avoided if the park were allowed to remain in a natural state, perhaps with a hiker/biker trail. Joining him were NBC

journalist Tim Russert, a handful of local Sierra Club members and others, totalling 35. Adrienne Coleman, Superintendent of Rock Creek Park, recommended a nonautomotive option. About 30 citizens, including Councilmember Jim Graham and Councilmember-elect Adrian Fenty, argued for the paving option.

Klinge Valley, which runs under Connecticut Avenue between the National Zoo and Cleveland Park, began its return to nature when a heavy rain washed out portions of the road in 1991. In 1995 Mayor Barry's DPW recognized

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# Conservation Issues

## A Letter from the Conservation Chair

Dear New Columbia Sierrans:

As this issue of the *Capital Sierran* shows, there is no shortage of conservation issues for us to work on here in the District: Rock Creek Park, Klinge Valley, clean fuel buses, sustainable development, trash transfer stations, Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, recycling ... The list goes on.

But after years of fighting bad projects, we may be on the verge of having a friendly mayor and city council who can help move a proactive environmental agenda forward. So, even in the face of potentially difficult times nationally, we are poised to make a significant difference here in the District.

Our only limitations? People and money.

If we continue to do good work, I'm convinced the money will be there to aid our efforts, and the national club has programs in place that can help us learn how to apply successfully for grants to support our work.

But the people, well, that's another matter. We have a handful of highly dedicated activists — many of whose names appear in these pages — who do a lot of advocacy work. But there's room for more — many more.

Are you one of those people who cares about conservation issues and wants to be a part of the action? Throughout this newsletter are articles about the issues we're working on, with the names and numbers and e-mail addresses of people you can contact to find out more.

As conservation chair, I also want to know what you think. Do you have skills that you'd like to put to work for the Sierra Club and the District's environment? Are we missing an issue that you are passionate about?

As we move forward into the new year, setting new priorities and following through on ongoing campaigns, we will also be planning how better to reach out to you and provide the support that you need so you can participate more fully in the issues we take on.

Call me (202-607-7094) or e-mail me (gwynjones@aol.com) and let me know what you think.

See you in the new year!

Gwyn Jones  
Conservation Chair

Floridians remind us: Every vote counts.  
Mail in your Chapter election ballot today (see pages 14-15).

## Clean Bus Campaign Wins Milestone Victory

by Mark Wenzler

The joint Sierra Club-Natural Resources Defense Council Clean Bus Campaign won a milestone victory in November when the Metro board of directors voted to buy 100 compressed natural gas (CNG) buses and to build a CNG refueling station. This is the first time that the nation's sixth largest bus system is buying anything but diesel buses.

Metro officials have come up with the \$13 million needed to buy 100 CNG buses and are seeking bids to build a special refueling station for those buses at their Bladensburg garage. The Metro board will meet in December to review the bids and is expected to give final approval to the CNG project. Metro also voted to spend several million dollars to clean up the existing diesel fleet by using low sulfur diesel fuel and by installing particle traps on the diesel bus exhaust systems. While we support cleaning up the existing diesel fleet, we see this as only a temporary solution. CNG buses are substantially cleaner than even the "cleanest" diesel buses.

The Sierra Club and NRDC have been working for more than a year now to persuade Metro to dump dirty diesel and buy much cleaner CNG buses. Diesel exhaust may be the most significant and

most underaddressed public health threat in urban America today. Diesel exhaust contains more than 450 chemical components, but the main threats it poses to public health can be classified under three broad categories: fine particulate matter (PM), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and toxic compounds. Those at greatest risk from diesel's hazardous mix are children, the elderly, people who smoke or have respiratory conditions, and people who exercise, work or live near diesel exhaust sources.

After the campaign gained support for CNG buses from key Metro board members Jim Graham (D.C.) and Chris Zimmerman (VA), as well as from the D.C. mayor and the entire city council, Metro's opposition to CNG began to soften. The agency now stands poised to be the biggest operator of CNG buses in the region.

While we are no doubt pleased with Metro's decision, we are now looking to the future. Metro will be replacing hundreds of older diesel buses over the coming years. Our challenge going forward will be to ensure that Metro works toward a cleaner future with an entire CNG bus fleet rather than returning to diesel.

## Sierra Club and Amnesty International Join Forces for Human Rights

by Keith Fort

The New Columbia Chapter will join with local members of Amnesty International to participate in the two organizations' joint Human Rights and the Environment campaign. The most visible activity of the campaign will be to seek the release of those who have been imprisoned and even tortured for working for environmental causes.

The Sierra Club and Amnesty International started the joint venture in December 1999. Michael Dorsey, director of the Sierra Club, explained the need for the undertaking: "Today in many countries it is dangerous work to be an environmentalist."

One goal of the Sierra Club's involvement in the Human Rights and the

Environment Campaign is to educate Sierra Club members and expand the campaign by working closely with Amnesty International. The Sierra Club believes that "environmental protection can only exist if human rights are guaranteed, and people are allowed to speak out for a safe and healthy environment." The two groups also urge members to lobby the White House, the State Department and Congress to include in U.S. foreign policy protection for those who work to save the environment.

Since many of the victims of injustice are in foreign countries, the joint work of the two groups often involves embassies

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## Restore the Core Presents at Building Museum

by Karen Font

On November 9, the Sierra Club's New Columbia Chapter and the National Building Museum jointly sponsored a presentation and panel discussion on sprawl titled "Restoring the Core: The Sierra Club Challenges Sprawl." More than 100 D.C.-area residents, students and sprawl activists packed the lecture hall at the National Building Museum to listen to panelists address specific sprawl issues within the District and present various approaches for a feasible solution to these problems.

Moderated by Christina Wilson, director of public programs for the museum, the panel consisted of Linda Cropp, chair of the D.C. Council; Deron Lovaas, representative of the Sierra Club's national Challenge to Sprawl campaign; Jim Dougherty, Legal Chair of the Sierra Club's New Columbia chapter.

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Many thanks to Wanda Bubriski, Danilo Pelletiere and Mary Vogel for coordinating the Restore the Core event at the National Building Museum.

## "No Trash Transfer in Ward 8! Trash, No! Grocery Store, Yes!"

by Julie Eisenhardt

Among the chants and calls to action of the last month, the needs of the Ward 8 community came through loud and clear: what the community needs is positive economic development, not more of the city's unwanted facilities.

The Ward 8 Coalition, working in partnership with the Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program, stands in the middle of a fight for the future of D.C. Village. The Solid Waste Site Selection Advisory Panel has recommended the site for a trash transfer station, and the community has galvanized in opposition to this idea.

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# Club Endorses Mixed-Use Development in Adams Morgan

On Tuesday, October 10, New Columbia Chapter representatives attended a neighborhood rally at King Emmanuel Baptist Church in Adams Morgan and announced the chapter's support for the efforts of community members to gain mixed-use development with a residential component between 18th and Champlain streets.

The site in question, currently a surface parking lot, is slated to be developed as a mix of parking, housing and retail. The mixed-use development was the result of a compromise plan dating from 1996 that was supported by Adams Morgan neighborhood associations, the Adams Morgan Business Association and Advisory Neighborhood Commission 1C. This compromise provides more parking than currently exists. However, some business owners and others in the neighborhood want to revisit the issue, despite the compromise, and they have promoted an alternative vision: a single-use garage with 540 spaces. While additional parking, as included in the mixed-use proposal, may be warranted, a 540-space garage would be a magnet for new cars — further choking Adams Morgan with traffic congestion and air pollution.

Chapter members, including Restore the Core Campaign Chair Danilo Pelletiere and Adams Morgan residents Wanda Bubriski and Dan Emerine, attended the rally to support community leaders who have been working to improve the livability of Adams Morgan. Darnell Bradford-El and Mike Gould, presidents

stand the most to gain — or lose — depending on the type of development built on the parking lot. The lot — site of several recent murders — has been a blight on the neighborhood. Many residents believe that an inhabited, well-designed space would be a benefit to the neighborhood, while a single-use parking garage would continue to attract the same safety problems as the current lot.

**"The success of Adams Morgan as a neighborhood and economic community will be determined by its walkability and its accessibility by public transit."**

*— from a statement made by the New Columbia Chapter, the regional Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities*

of the Reed-Cooke Neighborhood Association and the Kalorama Citizens Association, respectively, were instrumental in organizing the rally and in building support for the mixed-use compromise. Residents of the long-suffering Reed-Cooke neighborhood are particularly concerned, because they

Emerine read a statement on behalf of the New Columbia Chapter, the regional Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Washington Regional Network for Livable Communities (WRN). The statement read, in part, "The success of Adams Morgan as a neighborhood and economic community will be determined by its walkability and its accessibility by public transit. The efforts of city leaders and WMATA Board members have resulted in a number of transit options, including, within the last year, the Adams Morgan-U Street shuttle link between Metro stations. We encourage further efforts to make Adams Morgan a place that is reachable, and navigable, by transit, bicycling, walking, and car, but does not add new car traffic to neighborhood streets." The Chapter did not endorse the specific plans for any project, but made it clear that the Sierra

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## Smart Growth Principles

At its October 2000 meeting, the New Columbia Chapter Executive Committee endorsed the "Principles for Smart Growth" recently published by the National Neighborhood Coalition. Essentially, they are what our Restore the Core volunteers and activists have been saying all along, and we're glad to see the word is spreading!

Smart Growth promises new forms of growth and development that redirects investment into existing communities and combines greater fiscal and environmental responsibility with more livable communities. In order to be truly smart, growth strategies require regional alliances and coordination and must incorporate an equitable, neighborhood-focused approach that links low-income neighborhoods to regional economies and brings the benefits of growth to all communities.

### National Neighborhood Coalition Principles for Smart Growth

1. All neighborhoods and communities should have a fair share of the benefits as well as responsibilities of growth.
2. Growth should meet the economic, environmental and social needs of low-income and other communities.
3. Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color should have a strong voice in decisions about growth.
4. Growth should not displace low-income residents or people of color in urban or rural areas from their homes, livelihoods or communities.
5. Growth strategies should promote racial, economic and ethnic integration.
6. Growth strategies should make use of the human, economic and physical assets within communities.

*reprinted with permission from the National Neighborhood Coalition*

# New Study Shows Power Plant Pollution Shortens Lives

photos by Chris Weiss

Pollution from electric power plants shortens the lives of 1,140 people in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and 30,100 Americans nationwide every year, according to a study released in October by the Sierra Club and the American Lung Association of the District of Columbia. The groups gathered in front of Pepco's Benning Road power plant to release the report and to call on Pepco and other electric utilities to clean up their acts. Speakers included Dr. Ivan C. A. Walks, director of the Department of Health of the District of Columbia, and Dr. Bailus Walker, president of the American Lung Association of D.C.

"Pollution from dirty power plants is a serious threat to public health," said Dr. Walker. "More people die as a result of the pollution from these plants than from drunk driving or homicides every year."

The report, *Death, Disease and Dirty Power: Mortality and Health Damage Due to Air Pollution from Power Plants*, is based on research conducted by Abt Associates, a firm used frequently by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess the health benefits of the agency's regulatory programs. The research was developed using methodology approved by the EPA and reviewed by Professor John Spengler of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Among the report's key findings:

- Fine-particle pollution from dirty power plants shortens the lives of 1,140 people in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and 30,100 people nationwide each year.
- A 75% reduction in power plant pollution would avoid 762 of these deaths each year in the D.C. area, and 18,700 nationally.
- The D.C. region has the nation's second highest number of deaths from power plant pollution.
- Each year, power plant pollution also causes an estimated 28,600 asthma attacks in the D.C. region and 603,000 asthma attacks nationally.

Over 1,000 people in the D.C. region are sent to the hospital each year with breathing problems caused by power plant pollution.

At right (l to r): community activist George Gurley; D.C. Department of Health Director Dr. Ivan C. A. Walks; Mark Wenzler, Political Chair of the New Columbia Chapter; and Dr. Bailus Walker, president of the D.C. American Lung Association. Pepco's Benning Road power plant is in the background.



At left (l to r): Rachel Lipper of the American Lung Association (partially obscured); Kimberly Harris of Mothers of Asthmatics (speaking); Mark Wenzler; and George Gurley, community activist. Behind the speakers, a giant inflatable power plant is labeled to highlight the health damages caused by coal-burning power plants.

"Nearly all of the power plants in the District, Maryland and Virginia are exempted by a loophole in the Clean Air Act from meeting modern pollution control standards," said Mark Wenzler of the Sierra Club New Columbia Chapter. "Closing the special loophole for power plants and forcing them to cut their emissions is one of the easiest things we can do to improve public health in the region," he said. "Cleaning up power plants would save more than twice as many lives each year as seat belts do," Wenzler added, citing federal statistics on lives saved by seat belt usage.

"The staggering rate of death and disease due to power plant pollution cries out for a national solution," said

George Gurley, a longtime community and environmental activist in Ward 7 who has fought the expansion of Pepco's Benning Road power plant. "It's time to stop dragging our feet on cleaning up dirty power plants," Gurley added.

Several bills in Congress would protect public health by reducing power plant emissions by as much as 75%, and politicians of both parties have called for a comprehensive solution to the problem of power plant pollution. The Sierra Club called on Congress to act quickly to reduce power plant pollution.

The report is available on the web at <http://www.cleartheair.org>.

## 2000 Election Brings New Face to City Council

by Mark Wenzler, Political Chair

At press time, the wrangling over the presidential election was ongoing, with the Sierra Club's hopes hanging on Al Gore and the outcome in Florida. While the national outcome is uncertain, we do have some things to cheer about locally.

First and foremost, Adrian Fenty was elected to replace Charlene Drew Jarvis as councilmember for Ward 4. The Sierra Club endorsed Fenty in both the primary and general elections. While Jarvis had largely opposed the Sierra Club on most of our initiatives, we expect Fenty to be a reliable supporter. As an ANC commissioner in Ward 4, he spoke out against Bell Atlantic's plan to erect a cell phone tower in Rock Creek Park, and he has advocated for greater protection for Ward 4 residents impacted by diesel soot and noise from Metro's Northern bus garage. He supports our clean Metro bus initiative, will fight for more affordable downtown housing and is a strong supporter of measures to clean up the Anacostia River. We extend our congratulations to Mr. Fenty and look forward to working with him on the council.

Other successful candidates endorsed by the Sierra Club include D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, D.C. Councilmember At-Large Carol Schwartz, D.C. Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans, D.C. Ward 7 Councilmember Kevin



*New Ward 4 Councilmember  
Adrian Fenty*

Chavous, and Florence Pendleton, shadow U.S. Senator. While the Sierra Club-endorsed candidate for shadow U.S. Representative, Martin Thomas of the D.C. Statehood-Green Party, did not win, he did get nearly 20,000 votes, an impressive showing.

I wish to thank each of the members of the political committee who helped complete our election endorsements and worked to support our endorsed candidates, including Danilo Pelletiere, Chris Weiss, Gwyn Jones, Lucky Wentworth, Beth Solomon, Jim Dougherty and Brenda Moorman.

## Metro Branch Trail Update

by Paul Meijer

At a November 2 reception at the National Building Museum sponsored by the Washington Area Bicyclists Association (WABA), Mayor Williams gave a speech titled "Bicycling and Walking Away from the Sprawl in DC." He mentioned the Metropolitan Branch Trail prominently as an important future transportation corridor. It is good news that ideas to diminish car travel have gained attention in the highest circles of our city government.

Although a number of piece-wise steps have been taken toward implementation of the trail project, progress is unfortunately still hindered by the absence of a project manager at the Department of Public Works. In particular, significant questions about the acquisition of the necessary real estate remain to be addressed. Fortunately, WABA has engaged a competent specialist in this field.

On the Montgomery County section of the trail, considerable progress has been made. The County Department of Parks and Planning hired the firm of Lardner and Klein, which made a thorough study of the combined Metropolitan Branch and Capital Crescent trails from the Maryland state line to Jones Bridge Road. Segment by segment, the firm clearly laid out what is desirable and what may be possible. A public hearing was held on November 15 at Montgomery College.

To get involved with the Metropolitan Branch Trail, call Paul Meijer at 202-726-7364.

## Barry Farms Considers Future of Poplar Point

By Julie Eisenhardt

On October 28, 2000, the Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program held a picnic with the Barry Farms Resident Council to discuss what should be done with Section C of Anacostia Park/Poplar Point, as well as pertinent issues affecting the community of Barry Farms. The picnic was designed to detail the history of Poplar Point, inform residents about the proposals for the site and find ways in which Poplar Point can aid in improving the quality of life of the community.

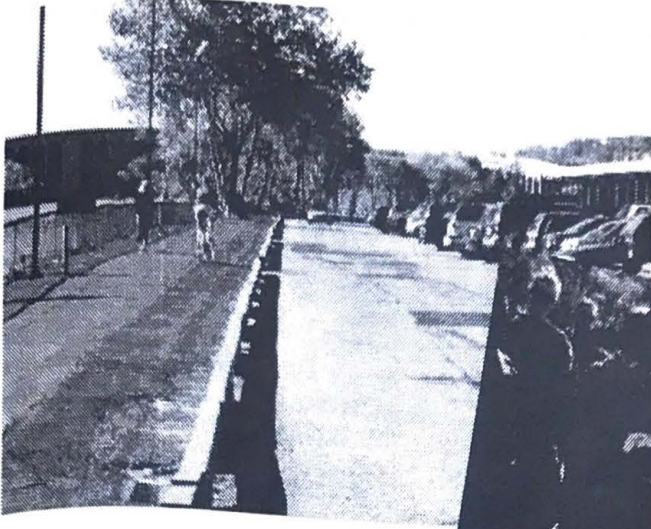
The architects of the Capitol have used Poplar Point for a park, a tree nursery and a botanic garden to grow the flowers and shrubbery that surround the landscape of the Capitol. These uses of the site left the land tainted with fertilizers and pesticides, making it inaccessible to the public. This fact has not, however, stopped developers from submitting proposals for the land that include a shopping center, a memorial garden to Frederick Douglass and a surface parking

lot for WMATA's Anacostia Metro Station.

The residents of Barry Farms and environmentalists voiced their concerns over the lack of grocery stores and recreational facilities for youth in the community and the need for better health care facilities. They looked at how using Poplar Point for these necessary services and facilities would improve a community in need of change and stability.

# New Park on the Waterfront

by Chris Craig  
photos by Ed Wheelless



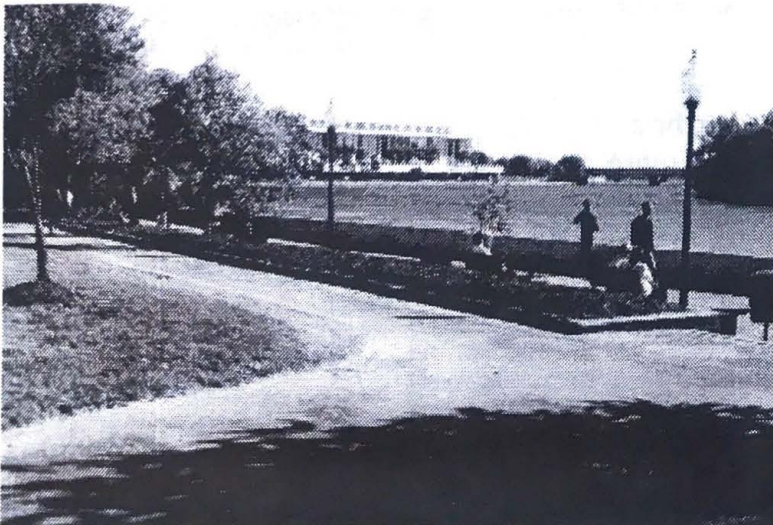
*Above: Parking lot pavement is already giving way to the beginnings of this multiple-use trail. At right: Senator Charles Percy speaks prior to the official ribboncutting ceremony*



The Georgetown Waterfront Park, Washington's newest national park, moved one step closer to realization on October 28. District resident and retired senator Charles Percy, District Congressional Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, and a host of honored guests, Park Service representatives, activists and well-wishers gathered for a ceremonial ribboncutting and celebration at the site of the new park, located along the Georgetown bank of the Potomac, between Washington Harbor and the Key Bridge.

Plans include a transformation from the present large parking lot and car impoundment center to a shaded park area with a multiple-use trail and boat docks. When completed, the park will provide an important missing link in Potomac shore greenspace that allows for public access.

Park planners point out that this will be the only park in the nation's capital to be built entirely through the efforts of citizens. Land was deeded to the National Park Service by the District government and the Federal Trade Commission, but volunteers are active in many ways to achieve completion of the park, including fund raising.



If you would like more information or to get involved, phone 202-342-7463 or write to Georgetown Waterfront Park, Georgetown Station, Box 3598, Washington, DC 20007-0098.

*Georgetown Waterfront Park — soon to be expanded and improved.*

## Building Museum

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Toni Griffin, Deputy Director for Revitalization Planning of the D.C. Office of Planning; and Toby Millman of Eakin/Youngtob Associates, Inc., a local smart-growth development firm.

Prior to the panel discussion, Lovaas gave a presentation describing the characteristics that define sprawl and elaborated on the various initiatives the Sierra Club is taking at both the national and local levels, through, respectively, the Challenge to Sprawl and Restore the Core campaigns. Among the statistics presented, Lovaas stated that:

- Between 1992 and 1997, the United States lost more than 3 million acres of green space.
- Road building and maintenance, costing us nearly \$200 million a day, has impacted a fifth of our total landmass with air, noise, and water pollution.
- In 1998 alone, Americans drove an alarming 2.6 trillion miles, equivalent to roughly 10,000 roundtrips to Mars.

Lovaas insisted that participation by all levels of government and the public is needed to effectively address these sprawl problems — from establishing federal initiatives promoting open-space protection and transit allocations to rewriting local zoning ordinances that promote multiple-use development in areas currently restricted to single use.

As for Washington D.C., Lovaas

## Trash Transfer

*continued from page 3*

D.C. Village, in the far Southwest corner of Washington, has been under fire before. Oxon Cove, adjacent to the site, was eyed for a private prison. This summer, the city considered D.C. Village as a possible site for a 1,000-bed homeless campus. Just as residents had defeated these proposals, the trash transfer station was dumped on their plate.

The Solid Waste Site Selection Advisory Panel released its initial report at a public event on Saturday, October 21. Ward 8 and the Sierra Club were out in full force, commenting again and again that trash transfer stations belong in industrial areas, not in our neighbor-

singled out Eastern Market and the U-Street corridor as examples of great neighborhoods within an urban core that are attracting an increasing number of D.C.-area residents, due largely to residents' access to transit, commercial facilities and quality housing.

After Lovaas's presentation, the panelists each had an opportunity to describe what they believe needs to be done to create a healthy, livable city. Linda Cropp began by stating that the District is facing a period of transition. Whereas in recent decades the District was losing its population at a rapid pace, in the past few years we have seen an upsurge in new residents. Cropp said that we must plan growth with care and ensure that we attract people in all stages of life — particularly middle-class families — and not just young professionals or empty nesters. She pointed out that both the D.C. public education system and the city's public safety programs are in dire need of revamping. She also stated that the D.C. Council has tripled the Office of Planning's budget since 1997, leading to the launch of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative earlier this year, and she announced the passing of new brownfields legislation.

Jim Dougherty welcomed Cropp's remarks as an indication of progress, noting that she had in the past evinced scant knowledge of environmental issues. He then proceeded to explain the power behind affirmative campaigns such as Restore the Core. Stating that the era of "big, bad projects" has passed, Dougherty said that "the sun is rising in the city," as developers and government

hoods. Speakers also stressed the injustice of transferring all the city's trash in African-American neighborhoods.

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**"It would be a grave injustice to dump more of the city's trash here."**

— Ward 8 Coalition member  
Eugene Dewitt Kinlow

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On November 17, as the advisory panel presented its final report, the Ward 8 Coalition and Sierra Club held a news conference and protest. They stressed the need to find a comprehensive, long-term solution to the city's waste problem rather than rushing to band-aid solutions. Speakers also stressed the

officials give more attention to the planning stages of new development projects and look to community members for ideas.

Toby Millman summed up the developer's perspective, noting the challenges developers face, including the task of finding opportunities for redevelopment within the District. He also mentioned the importance of balancing the issues of development with those of density, scale, greenspace, transit, traffic and architectural style. Millman stated that within all these issues there is a wide range of perspectives open for discussion, but for that same reason it is important for community members, government officials and environmental representatives to work with developers to achieve a better product.

Toni Griffin, a recent addition to the Office of Planning, echoed Millman's call for active public involvement and said, "Citizen participation is so critical to whatever a government or private sector entity can do, because, ultimately, the sustainability of this vision relies on all of us."

Time constraints precluded panelists from responding to the audience's written questions. Questions and answers will, however, be posted to the Restore the Core's weekly e-mail update beginning in mid-December, with the purpose being to provide a forum for discussion among interested participants. Those who are not on the Restore the Core e-mail list can contact Margrete Strand-Rangnes, Restore the Core volunteer coordinator, at [mstrand@citizen.org](mailto:mstrand@citizen.org) to subscribe.

environmental injustice of the proposed site.

"We're already dealing with the sewage plant, St. Elizabeth's mental hospital and more," remarked Eugene Dewitt Kinlow of the Ward 8 Coalition. "It would be a grave injustice to dump more of the city's trash here."

The Committee on Public Works and the Environment heard arguments from residents on November 29 and will make a recommendation to the Department of Public Works. Residents and other activists from across the city are committed to staying in this fight not just until the D.C. Village proposal is defeated but until the city has a long-term plan for waste management and until developers break ground in D.C. Village for a positive development.

# CapitalSierran



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APPENDIX C  
NEWSLETTER OF  
THE NEW COLUMBIA CHAPTER

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1  
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*D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams calls for measures to reduce automobile traffic in Rock Creek Park.*

## Mayor Supports Traffic Restrictions in Rock Creek

Recreation and park advocates achieved a major breakthrough in January as D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams called for measures to reduce automobile traffic in Rock Creek Park. Following through on a commitment made during his November speech to the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), the mayor sent a letter asking National Park Service (NPS) officials to explore weekday traffic restrictions on upper Beach Drive.

Reversing the city's previous opposition to any traffic measures in the

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## Klinge Valley Campaign Wins Council Support

The Sierra Club's campaign to restore Klinge Valley took several steps forward in January and February, as three members of the City Council declared their support for our plan to remove the old, partially washed-out roadway and replace it with a nonvehicular alternative, such as a hiker-biker trail. Councilmember Kathy Patterson (Ward 3) went on record first, following a meeting with 22 Ward 3 members of the Save It, Don't Pave It campaign. Her January letter to Mayor Williams urged him to spend the City's

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## Deadline, Summer Issue: May 14

*Capital Sierran* is published quarterly by the New Columbia Chapter of the Sierra Club. Membership dues pay for subscription to this publication. Nonmembers may subscribe for \$5.00 a year by writing to: Sierra Club, Membership Services Department, 85 Second Street, San Francisco, CA 94105.

## Change of Address

Send address changes to:  
Sierra Club, Member Services  
*Capital Sierran*  
P.O. Box 52968  
Boulder, CO 80328-2968  
or  
address.changes@sierraclub.org

Please include both your old and new addresses for fast service.

## Display Advertising

Contact the editors (see page 10) for ad rates and specifications.

## Membership

Forms should be addressed to:  
Sierra Club  
P.O. Box 52968  
Boulder, CO 80328-2968

# Conservation Issues

*This issue of the Capital Sierran provides a wealth of information on some of the Chapter's recent activities. Here are some highlights.*

## Recycling

November marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our recycling lawsuit to compel the District to follow and enforce its own recycling laws. To mark that anniversary, Jim Dougherty testified before the D.C. Council's Committee on Public Works and the Environment, chaired by Councilmember Carol Schwartz (R-At Large). As the only witness before the committee for this Recycling Oversight Hearing, Jim gave his testimony in the form of a report card:

Curbside: D  
Public education: F  
Private sector enforcement: F  
Recycling in public buildings: F  
Procurement of recycled materials: F  
Overall Grade: F

Needless to say, recycling in the District does not mean just curbside! This issue promises to be high on the Chapter agenda in 2001. If you want to get involved, contact Jim Dougherty at [jimdougherty@aol.com](mailto:jimdougherty@aol.com) or (202) 488-1140.

## National Capital Planning Commission Testimony

As the National Capital Planning Commission issues drafts of its comprehensive plan for public comment, the Chapter has responded to various "elements" of the plan. Most recently, Gwyn Jones provided written comments on the Monuments and Memorials Element and the Federal Environment Element.

The first element is an attempt by NCPC to coordinate with the National Park Service to designate future sites for monuments and memorials around the District. The second element provides planning policies relating to the environment in the National Capital Region.

Last updated in 1982, the new draft of the Federal Environment Element offers a significant improvement and covers a wide range of issues, from air and water quality to solid waste management. New to this draft are sections on hazardous waste management, environmental justice, and radiofrequency electromagnetic fields.

Last fall Gwyn worked with Appalachian Regional Representative Joy Oakes to develop a regional response to the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element.

## EPEC

The regional Environmental Public Education Campaign (EPEC), which includes the Maryland, Virginia and District Chapters, received news that the grant funding will continue for a fifth year. Among EPEC's top priorities transit, especially the circumferential Metro Purple Line; air quality; and federal jobs. For more information, contact Gwyn Jones at (202) 607-7094 or [gwynjones@aol.com](mailto:gwynjones@aol.com).

**Kingle Valley** remains a hot issue, and the Chapter has been working with community leaders on both sides of Rock Creek Park in the campaign to save Kingle Valley, which is steadily gaining momentum (see article page 1 and announcement page 7). Contact Jim Dougherty at (202) 488-1140 or [jimdougherty@aol.com](mailto:jimdougherty@aol.com) for more information.

**Trash Transfer Stations and District** management of solid waste has garnered strong interest from the community, the Chapter and our environmental allies. Leading the way was our environmental justice organizer, Julie Eisenhardt, who was key in organizing a trash summit on Feb. 24. To find out what you can do, contact Julie at (202) 610-3360 or [julie.eisenhardt@sierraclub.org](mailto:julie.eisenhardt@sierraclub.org).

**Restore the Core!** kicked off the new year with a planning session Feb. 22 to set priorities for 2001. The Anacostia River and the neighborhoods on either side should be key this year. Dan Emerine and Wanda Bubriski take over the helm from Danilo Pelletiere as the new co-chairs. To get involved contact them at [dansaku@gateway.net](mailto:dansaku@gateway.net) or (202) 986-6749 or [wabubriski@erols.com](mailto:wabubriski@erols.com) or (202) 232-6113.

*As you read these pages, don't hesitate to contact the leaders listed for issues that interest you. If you have general conservation questions or don't know whom to call, contact Gwyn Jones at (202) 607-7094 or [gwynjones@aol.com](mailto:gwynjones@aol.com). We WANT to hear from you!*

## Club Sues FDA

In February, the Sierra Club, the Forest Conservation Council and other environmental groups filed suit in U.S. District Court in Washington to prevent the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from constructing a new FDA headquarters facility in White Oak, Maryland. According to the lawsuit, the project will violate federal law, which presumptively requires federal agencies to locate their headquarters in downtown Washington. In addition, the Sierra Club claims that the environmental impact statement prepared for the project is legally inadequate because it never evaluated alternative locations for the facility — especially locations in D.C.

The White Oak site is located approximately 1 1/2 miles outside the Beltway, adjacent to New Hampshire Ave. in Montgomery County, about 3 miles from the nearest Metrorail station.

"This case is about suburban sprawl," said Jim Dougherty, attorney for the plaintiffs, adding, "with 6,000 new parking spaces, this project will add almost that many cars to the morning rush hour every day. From the standpoint of the city, the region as a whole, and those who breathe air, the best place for mega-complexes like this one is the Southeast Federal Center or some other downtown site on the Metro system."

The proposed FDA headquarters facility will house approximately 6,000 federal workers and will cost an estimated 600 million dollars.

## Metro Branch Trail

by Paul Meijer

Slow but steady progress continues on the Metropolitan Branch Trail (MBT), a paved hiker-biker trail that will eventually link the Maryland suburbs of Takoma Park and Silver Spring with north central D.C. and Union Station. Montgomery County planners recently completed studies on the MBT and transferred their plan to the county Department of Public Works and Transportation. The plan calls for the Silver Spring branch of the trail to begin at the Metro station and connect the historic MARC rail station and the Takoma Park campus of Montgomery College. Trail activists are optimistic that funding will be allocated for the trail in the near future.

In the District, a trail design is now complete for the Union Station vicinity,

## Restore the Core! Kick-Off March 22

The chapter's Restore the Core! (RtC) campaign to revitalize urban neighborhoods and stop suburban sprawl is moving in new directions. Building on the successes of the past year — including the publication of the 24-page *Citizen's Guide to Building a Livable DC*, several well-attended neighborhood walks, participation in planning workshops on the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative, and the symposium "Restoring the Core" held in November at the National Building Museum — this year the campaign will work to implement the tenets put forth in the *Citizen's Guide* while continuing its effective outreach programs.

The campaign is now co-chaired by Dan Emerine and Wanda Bubriski. To kick off this year's campaign, Dan and Wanda, along with a dedicated team of RtC volunteers, invite all Club members and interested friends to a **Working Meeting** to be held **Thursday, March 22, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.** at the **Sumner School, 1201 17th St., NW**. The guest-speaker, Deron Lovaas, representative for Sierra Club's national *Challenge to Sprawl* campaign, will start things off with a brief overview of what the Club is doing at the national level. The rest of the session will focus on the local campaign: our goals and strategies for the year as well as how we can draw upon the skills and expertise of members and friends in helping to Restore the Core.

For more information, contact Dan Emerine at [dansaku@gateway.net](mailto:dansaku@gateway.net) or (202) 986-6749 or Wanda Bubriski at [wbubriski@yahoo.com](mailto:wbubriski@yahoo.com) or (202) 232-6113. Sumner School is located at the northeast corner of M & 17th streets (entrance on 17th St.). Metro: Farragut North station (Red Line), use L St. exit.

and there may be a groundbreaking ceremony in the near future. The D.C. government is cooperating with the National Park Service on an environmental assessment of the trail in the Fort Totten area.

Trail activists are currently conducting a study on increased value of homes in the vicinities of hiker-biker trails. For more information or to get involved with the MBT, contact Paul Meijer at [meijer@cua.edu](mailto:meijer@cua.edu) or (202) 726-7364.

## MWROP Welcomes New Participants and Leaders

by Pat Hopson

The Metropolitan Washington Regional Outings Program (MWROP) is seeking new participants and new leaders to expand and diversify our outings program. MWROP is a collaborative effort of local Sierra Club chapters in D.C., Maryland and Virginia that conducts year-round outings within an approximately 150-mile radius of Washington, D.C. In calendar year 2000, MWROP conducted 186 outings with 1802 participants. Most outings (169) were day hikes. There were also two backpacking trips, seven bicycle trips (including one multi-day trip), seven canoe trips, and one ski/dance outing. Day hikes included history outings, conservation outings, poetry hikes, moonlight hikes and service trips.

### Leaders Wanted

MWROP is currently seeking new leaders for all types of outings, especially backpack, bicycle and canoe outings; shorter, close-in hikes that are Metro accessible; family outings; and outings with an explicit conservation-education component. Potential leaders must be current Sierra Club members, experienced hikers (or bicyclists, canoeists, etc.) and competent at map reading. Leaders must have or obtain standard first aid certification. (Evening and Saturday first aid courses are offered by various local branches of the Red Cross; outings leaders are reimbursed for the course.)

Leader trainees are expected to lead two outings with the help of an experienced leader, then at least two additional outings on their own in the first year. To remain an active leader requires at least two outings each year thereafter.

For a sampling of upcoming outings, see page 13. Sierrans interested in becoming leaders are urged to contact Marjorie Richman, MWROP leader coordinator, at (301) 320-5509, or Jim Finucane, MWROP chairman, at (301) 365-3485, evenings before 9 p.m. We hope to hear from you soon!



# Environmental Justice News

by Julie Eisenhardt, EJ Organizer

## Citizens Call for End of Trashed Neighborhoods

On February 24, citizens from around D.C. and the region joined together to create a citizens' plan for waste management in D.C. The plan came as a result of a day's hard work at the Citizens' Summit on Trash Transfer Issues and puts forth, for the first time, parameters for what D.C. residents want their government to do with trash. The Sierra Club Environmental Justice (EJ) Program was a major sponsor, partnered with the local Chapter and more than ten hosting organizations and the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

The day began bright and early with introductory and in-depth information about the trash transfer industry and the problems with waste management in D.C. From there, participants divided into three issue-based break-out sessions to discuss public health, environmental issues or environmental justice. They developed requirements for waste management in the sessions and then reported back to the large group in the afternoon. After the reports, participants

added final touches to the requirements and created the Citizen's Plan. The day ended with a press conference presenting the new plan.

"This is what we needed to move forward on these issues," remarked Jim Schulman of the Citizens Against Trash Transfer Stations. "Now we can move ahead together, as one city, to solve our waste problems."

Waste management issues have long plagued the District, from our poor recycling record to our inability to efficiently manage curbside trash pick-up. All the problems together add to the burden on neighborhoods where the trash is transferred. By considering the big picture, summit attendees were able to create a solution to the bigger issues. Recycling promotion and enforcement, waste reduction, and other strategies to ease the waste burden are integral parts of a solution and were prominently featured in the Citizen Plan.

## Students Spread the Word about Littering

Covering all the bases, students are getting the word out about littering. Six tenth graders from Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy are completing a community service project in partnership with the Environmental Justice (EJ) Program focusing on litter prevention in Southeast D.C. By designing Metro ads, making presentations to elementary schools and holding an event commemorating the demolition of a condemned building, the students are making Southeast a better place.

Called "Clean Neighborhoods Now," the project aims to educate and motivate residents on issues of litter and health. The students work with the EJ program every Thursday afternoon as part of Chavez School's graduation requirement. They're getting hands-on experience working with a community while forwarding the goals of the EJ program.

*continued on page 14*

## Talking Trash Quiz *by Brenda Moorman*

*The Sierra Club was instrumental in returning curbside recycling to D.C., and Sierra Club members strongly favor recycling. However, there is still misunderstanding about how the program works. Take this true or false quiz and see how you score!*

1. Only white paper can be recycled — no legal pads. T or F?
2. All #1 and #2 plastics can be recycled. T or F?
3. Newspapers should be tied with string or put in plastic bags. T or F?
4. Manila envelopes with metal clasps can be recycled. T or F?
5. Metal rings and labels can be left on cans and bottles. T or F?
6. Junk mail can be recycled. T or F?
7. Telephone books, catalogs and paperback books can be recycled. T or F?
8. Wet newspapers cannot be recycled. T or F?
9. Cereal boxes, pizza boxes, and beer and egg cartons cannot be recycled. T or F?
10. Schools and businesses in DC are required to recycle. T or F?

### Answers

1. False. Both white and colored paper can be recycled.
2. False. #1 and #2 plastic items can be recycled, but only ones with narrow necks, such as milk jugs. No wide mouth containers, such as margarine tubs, can be recycled, even if they are #1 or #2.
3. False. Newspapers may be tied with string or put in *paper* bags, but not plastic bags.
4. True. Manila and regular paper envelopes with clasps can be recycled — but *not* if they have plastic or cellophane windows.
5. True. Rings and labels can be left on cans and bottles.
6. False. Junk mail cannot be recycled. The recycling contract with the city says no. No clear reason why. Maybe they hate junk mail as much as we do.
7. False. Telephone books and catalogs are OK, but paperback books are not.
8. False. Wet newspapers can be recycled. Rain is no excuse for not putting out your recycling.
9. True. All those boxes and cartons are considered mixed materials and cannot be recycled.
10. True. Schools and businesses are required to recycle, but most don't. Does yours? Talk to your office manager or school principal to get a program started. The rate of recycling in D.C. is about 14% — less than half the rate of surrounding jurisdictions. *We can do a lot better!*

Rate your score:

10 correct — trash wizard

9 correct — trash master

8 correct — trash scholar

7 correct — trash student

6 or fewer correct — register for remedial recycling

Remember: Talk trash to your friends and neighbors. We'll all benefit!





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Newsletter of the Washington, D.C. Chapter

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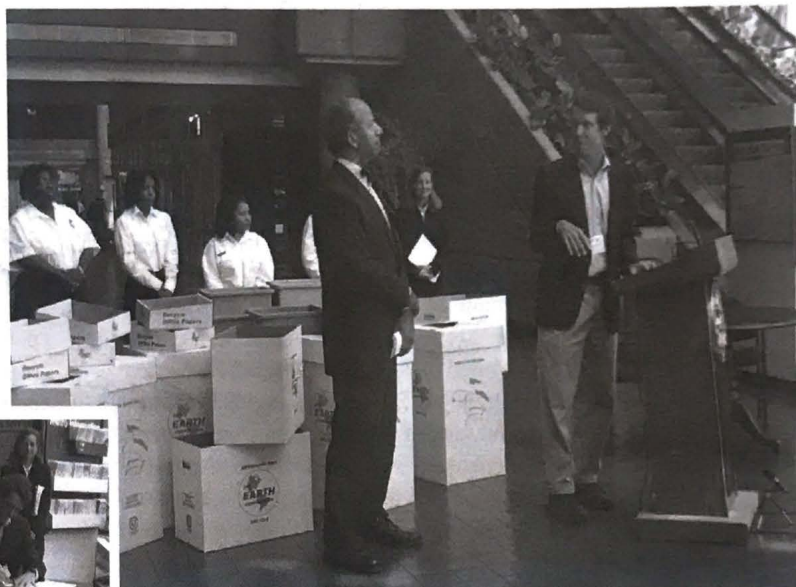
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## Earth Day Victory!

### Chapter, City Sign Recycling Accord



Above, Sierra Club leader Jim Dougherty (right) and Mayor Anthony Williams (left) make the recycling agreement public while newly hired recycling inspectors (in white) and Sierra Club President Jennifer Ferenstein (in black, holding papers) look on. At left, Williams and Dougherty sign the agreement.

By Jim Dougherty

A 12-year campaign to bring recycling to the District reached a major milestone in April with the settlement of a lawsuit that the Chapter brought against the City in 1990. On Earth Day, Mayor Williams sat down with Sierra Club leaders to sign an agreement that requires recycling in City office buildings. More important, the agreement also requires the City to enforce the City's 1988 Recycling Law in the commercial sector.

The 18-page settlement agreement—the product of two years of negotiations between the two parties—contains three key provisions:

1. *Enforcement of Commercial Property Recycling*  
The City will enforce the Recycling Act as

it applies to owners and operators of commercial property, such as office buildings, apartment houses, and condominiums. The Recycling Law has always made recycling in such buildings mandatory, but the general rate of compliance has been estimated at about 5 percent, and the City stopped enforcing the law in 1995.

2. *In-House Government Recycling*

The City will begin recycling paper in its four largest office buildings on April 30, 2002. Recycling of paper will be required at all other government buildings by October 22, 2004.

3. *Procurement of Recycled Paper*

At least 45 percent of all paper and paper products (e.g., paper towels) purchased

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## Letter from the Chair

# Good News and Bad News for Clean Air

On April 18, the board of directors of the Metropolitan Washington Transit Authority took the historic step of voting to purchase 250 new clean buses powered by compressed natural gas (CNG) and to build a refueling facility for them in Arlington County. Combined with Metro's existing fleet of 164 CNG buses and the existing refueling facility at Bladensburg in DC, the new purchase will mean that 414 buses—nearly a third of Metro's fleet of 1500 buses—will be clean fuel buses by 2004. Metro's environmental leadership will bring tremendous air quality improvements to the DC region. That's the good news.

The bad news is that our region continues to have some of the worst air quality in the nation. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the DC region is in chronic and serious noncompliance with federal healthy air standards for ozone smog. The region also fails to meet a new standard now being implemented for fine particle soot, a pollutant linked to tens of thousands of deaths each year nationwide.

While local efforts to clean the air are important, and can help achieve real health benefits, the sad fact is that even if we eliminated all locally-generated air pollution, the region would likely continue to fail federal air quality standards. That is because our region is downwind from the biggest polluters in America: coal-fired power plants.

More than half of the nation's electricity comes from burning coal, primarily in decades-old plants lacking the pollution controls that other industries have been required to use for years. Because older coal-fired plants enjoy a lucrative exemption from clean air controls, they have a competitive advantage over newer and cleaner sources of energy such as solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, and fuel cells. Yet another result of this exemption is that coal-fired power plants are the number one source of our nation's worst air pollution problems.

An October 2000 study by an EPA consultant showed that in the DC region, power plant air pollution cuts short the lives of more than 1400 people and causes tens of

thousands of asthma attacks every year. A May 2002 study by the Harvard School of Public Health showed that just five power plants in the DC region cause more than 250 deaths each year, and that the health impacts are greatest among low income and African American populations.

There is no longer any doubt that power plant air pollution is a serious killer and that older coal-fired power plants must be cleaned up if we are ever to achieve healthy air in our communities.

The U.S. Senate, led by Environment and Public Works Committee chairman Jim Jeffords (I-VT), is preparing to do just that. The "Clean Power Act of 2002" would force speedy reductions in the worst power plant pollutants, including carbon dioxide, the primary cause of global warming. The committee is preparing to vote on this bill in June.

However, a monkey wrench has been thrown into the Senate's efforts to clean up power plant pollution: the so-called "Clear Skies Initiative" announced by President Bush in February. While cloaked as a "more reasonable" power plant cleanup approach, the President's plan would actually allow plants to emit more pollution than would be permitted simply by enforcing existing laws. And it would broaden the loophole that allows the oldest and dirtiest plants to escape cleanup, thus locking in a future of polluted—not clean and clear—skies. Like the Administration's energy plan before it, "Clear Skies" appears to be the handiwork of energy industry lobbyists.

We in the DC region, with the leadership of Metro and others, are doing our share to clean up the air. It's time for the biggest polluters—coal-fired power plants—to do their share, too. Congress should reject weak measures like the President's Clear Skies plan and enact meaningful power plant cleanup legislation. Senator Jefford's Clean Power Act is a good place to start, and it deserves the support of all of us who breathe the air.

— Mark Wenzler  
DC Chapter Chair

**"Capital Sierran" Editors**  
Chris Craig, Nadia Steinzor,  
and Gwyn Jones

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## Update

### Air Quality and Transportation

By Melanie Mayock

#### New proposals from Maryland; Virginia Relies on Unreliable Programs

Throughout the DC region, smog causes 130,000 asthma attacks and sends more than 2,400 people to the hospital every summer. Last year, the region had 24 days in which air quality failed to meet federal health standards. At the same time, transportation planners have discovered that emissions from cars and trucks in the region were higher than expected, and that the region would fail to meet its 2005 clean air goals unless additional steps were taken to reduce pollution.

Given this situation, Maryland, Virginia, and the District struggle to find ways to improve air quality in the region sufficiently to meet the health standards of the federal Clean Air Act. At the May 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Transportation Planning Board, representatives of Maryland and Virginia released their plans for reducing emissions from cars and trucks.

Maryland's proposal, at a cost of about \$43 million over three years, includes additional investments in pedestrian and bicycle facilities and transit-oriented development projects (which would put more jobs and housing near Metro stops in suburban areas). Sierra Club and other environmental groups have praised these projects because they promise long-term benefits in the form of more opportunities to live and work near transit and decreased reliance on cars.

Virginia has proposed increasing speed limit enforcement, promoting telecommuting, and conducting outreach to employers about the region's Commuter Choice program, which offers public transit benefits to employees. Although important, these strategies do nothing to reform transportation and land use policies over the long haul.

Even with the new projects announced by Maryland and Virginia, the region has yet

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### Supporting the Metro Branch Trail

As reported in the Winter 2001-2002 issue of the *Capital Sierran*, the Metropolitan Branch Trail (MBT) recently opened in the area of Union Station in the form of striped bike lanes on 2nd Street, NE. The MBT will eventually link Silver Spring with Union Station for pedestrians and bikers. It will provide both an alternative route for commuters and recreational green space in an otherwise underserved area of Washington.

Development of the trail has made headway in recent months. The Louis Dreyfus Property Group, which included the trail and bicycle parking in the design of its development project known as Station Place, subsequently received an annual meeting award from the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). In addition, at a March 8 ceremony attended by 100 cyclists and dignitaries, the District of Columbia transferred \$6 million in federal funds to the Washington Area Transit Authority for design and construction of the trail at the new Red Line Metro station on New York Ave., NE.

But now the MBT faces a new challenge. In Takoma Park, DC, a housing development at the intersection of Carroll Street, NE and Metro's Red Line station threatens the right of way of the trail. If built, this complex could force the trail onto a circuitous route through several busy intersections.

At a recent hearing on a small area plan for the Takoma Park neighborhood, the Sierra Club joined WABA, the District's Bicycle Advisory Council, and the MBT Coalition in arguing for a direct and safe trail with sensible transportation links. If you would like to get involved in this effort, contact Paul Meijer at 202-726-7364 or [meijer@cua.edu](mailto:meijer@cua.edu).

### Metro Adds Bike Racks to Buses

Metro's bus fleet will soon be equipped with bike racks. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) board voted recently to purchase the racks, each of which can hold two bicycles, for \$1.6 million. They will be installed starting this summer, and all 1400 of Metro's buses should have the racks by March 2003.

The racks will enable cyclists to use public transportation and extend their two-wheeled commuting range. Bike racks are currently found on many of the nation's bus fleets, including those in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Seattle, and Las Vegas. Montgomery County Ride-On buses have been equipped with the racks for several years.



*Metro plans to add bike racks similar to this one in Portland.*

## DC's Air Quality in the News

*continued from page 3*

to come up with the emissions reductions required to meet Clean Air Act standards. Officials have until July to pass a transportation program with sufficient clean air measures, or they risk losing federal transportation dollars.

### Failing the Grade

Once again, the American Lung Association's State of the Air 2002 Report gives the DC region an "F" for air quality. The region is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> worst in the nation when it comes to air pollution. For more details on the report, visit [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

At the same time, there are victories. Fortunately for Washingtonians who suffer through smoggy summers, a ruling in late March by the DC Court of Appeals upheld the Environmental Protection Agency's new standards for ozone and particulate pollution.

### Considering New Options

The District Department of Transportation has hired a full-time Pedestrian Safety Program Coordinator. Harry Cepeda wants to hear from the public about ideas for making DC's streets safer and friendlier to pedestrians. Contact him at 202-671-2561 or [harry.cepeda@dc.gov](mailto:harry.cepeda@dc.gov). For more information on pedestrian issues in DC, visit [www.walkdc.org](http://www.walkdc.org).

With regard to public transportation, the District Department of Transportation is studying several possibilities for expanding services within the city. Officials have identified three possible routes for new transit: north-south on Georgia Ave; crosstown from Woodley Park through U Street to the Minnesota Avenue Metro station; and east-west from Georgetown along M Street to the new convention center. Officials are studying three options for these corridors: heavy rail, light rail, and rapid transit buses. For more information on these plans, see [http://ddot.dc.gov/information/documents/frames/transit\\_study.pdf](http://ddot.dc.gov/information/documents/frames/transit_study.pdf)

### Talking and Acting

Interested in helping clean up DC's smoggy air? Join the Chapter's new Air Quality committee, which meets the third

Monday of each month at 7pm at the Brickskeller in Dupont Circle. Topics include improving and expanding Metrorail and Metrobus in the District; improving DC's bicycle and pedestrian facilities; encouraging transit-oriented development (placing jobs and housing near transit); and much more! RSVP to Dan Emerine at 202-986-6749 or [demerine@earthlink.net](mailto:demerine@earthlink.net).

The Metro DC Challenge to Sprawl Campaign, made up of volunteers from DC, Maryland, and Virginia, is committed to fighting sprawl and building a better future for the region. For more information on activities and how to get involved, contact Melanie Mayock, Sierra Club Conservation Organizer, at 703-312-0533 x110 or [Melanie.Mayock@sierraclub.org](mailto:Melanie.Mayock@sierraclub.org), or visit [www.sierraclub.org/dc/sprawl](http://www.sierraclub.org/dc/sprawl).

## An Outer Beltway or Smart Growth for the Washington Region?

*By Stewart Schwartz,  
Coalition for Smarter Growth*

Two years ago, the Brookings Institution issued *A Region Divided*, a report demonstrating the educational and socioeconomic stresses faced by the east side of DC and inner Prince George's County. The inequalities in our region were confirmed recently by a new regional activity center map produced by the Council of Governments, which shows that Prince George's County—which has four Metro lines and thirteen Metro stations—will have very few jobs in 2025.

At the same time, highway groups are gaining momentum to build the Inter-County Connector (ICC) and the Techway, two projects that will guarantee that all top employers locate far beyond DC and Prince George's County. In addition, the business lobby is trying to push through a regressive sales tax hike in Northern Virginia in order to fund new highways in outlying areas, which would draw development even further out into the countryside.

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Help get involved in cleaning up Washington's dirty air. Come to the Clean Air Campaign volunteer orientation on Wed., July 10, 7-9 pm, Club Office, 401 C St., N.E. Sierra Club is launching an educational campaign about air pollution and sprawl in our region using the new video "Red Alert! The Washington Region Fights Unhealthy Air." Attend this meeting to learn the basics on air quality and find out how you can help. Contact Melanie Mayock, 703-312-0533x110 or [melanie.mayock@sierraclub.org](mailto:melanie.mayock@sierraclub.org).

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# More CNG Buses On the Way

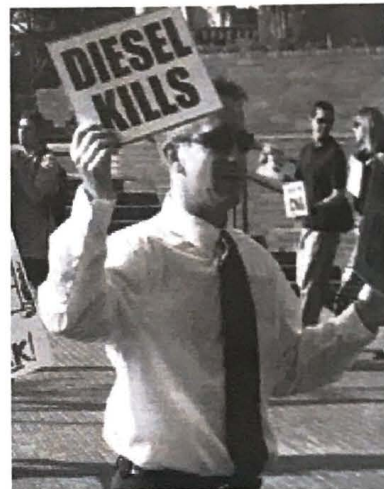
The Washington region's air quality got a significant boost April 18 when the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA) voted to purchase 250 compressed natural gas (CNG) buses to replace its aging fleet of diesel buses. This new purchase will supplement the 164 CNG buses already in operation. Jim Graham, DC's representative on the WMATA Board, joined board chairman Chris Zimmerman and a majority of members in choosing the newer, much cleaner technology over less expensive but polluting diesel buses.

After the new buses are purchased over the next two years, more than a quarter of Metro's 1500 buses will run on CNG, making it one of the largest CNG fleets in the country. In addition, although the purchase of any new diesel buses over the next two years was not approved, WMATA voted in favor of retrofitting existing diesel buses with particle traps and running them on low sulfur diesel fuel. These actions will make a major contribution to cleaning up the air in the DC region.

Sierra Club members and other clean air activists were instrumental in bringing about this decision. Chapter chair Mark Wenzler and Elliott Negin of the Natural Resource Defense Council worked for months to build support for CNG buses both in local communities and on the WMATA board. Hundreds of activists sent faxes to WMATA supporting CNG in the days prior to the vote. And on the morning of the vote, 30 people took to the sidewalks in front of Metro headquarters, chanting and bearing signs saying "I Want My CNG" and "Diesel Kills."

If you would like to get involved in Sierra's efforts to improve the region's air quality, contact Melanie Mayock at 703-312-0533x110 or [melanie.mayock@sierraclub.org](mailto:melanie.mayock@sierraclub.org).

*Top: Demonstration prior to the WMATA decision on which buses to purchase; Center left: DC Activist Karen Skulgit; Center right: DC Sierra Club Chapter Chair Mark Wenzler; Bottom: Wenzler and Rolando Andrew, Executive Director of American Lung Assoc. of DC talk to crowd.*



Photos by Sean Robertson

*Letter from the Conservation Chair*

## Achieving Sustainability Means Not Burning Out

After a particularly busy few days or weeks, or upon completing a major work project, it's good to slow down. Don't rush, let go of the worry over deadlines, stop hearing the clock ticking away. Smell the flowers and look around.

In addition to being good for your health, this shift in pace helps you gather strength and energy for the next round of activities. Yet I increasingly find myself feeling that, when it comes to environmental work—both locally and nationally—we cannot afford to ease up. Even as we enjoy our victories of the past several months, constant vigilance and action are necessary to create awareness of problems, counter unforeseen steps by the opposition, and manage sudden changes in the political or budgetary scene.

An increased sense of urgency prevailed in the DC Chapter recently with regard to one of our conservation campaigns: Klingle Valley. We've known that the fight to keep the road closed to motor vehicles did not end with Mayor Williams' announcement in December that he supports building a hiker/biker trail.

But as detailed in this issue of the *Capital Sierran* (see p. 7), a stealthy move by one City Council member—followed by unfounded but widespread declarations of a victory by pro-road advocates—has forced the need for a new strategy and revamped messages on the part of Klingle Valley activists. It's not that anyone had grown complacent; we just dared to relax a bit and savor having gotten a bit ahead of the curve.

Fortunately, Sierrans and other environmentally minded people

throughout DC are committed to their beliefs and causes. As a result, they seem to always be able to find untapped wells of energy whenever the need arises. This is clear in the constant progress of the Challenge to Sprawl campaign, the long history of Restore the Core activities, the new initiative to promote low-impact development, and revitalized efforts to improve the management of Rock Creek Park.

The volunteers involved in these and other Chapter activities know that successful campaigns can take a very long time. The trick is to not lose sight of the big picture while making sure that "rapid reaction" capabilities are available in the short term. The task of every activist is to maintain high levels of commitment and energy while avoiding burnout.

The best way for us to stay balanced in our work and our lives is to collaborate with others and continually harness new energy in the form of new volunteers. Doing so helps ensure that when one person is temporarily unavailable, others can step in. And having more committed activists working on a campaign means that everyone can maintain a better balance in their busy lives. That would be the true mark of sustainability!

I hope that Sierra members enjoy reading this newsletter and learning about the DC Chapter's hard work during a relaxed, unhurried moment. And afterwards, I hope that many readers will decide to refocus some of their time and energy, and help the Chapter move closer to its goals.

--Nadia Steinzor  
Conservation Chair

## Rock Creek Park Plan Expected Soon

By Jason Broehm

The National Park Service (NPS) is expected to release its long-awaited draft general management plan for Rock Creek Park this summer. Following its release, the public will have an opportunity to comment on the draft plan by submitting written comments during a 90-day public comment period. The NPS is also expected to hold a public hearing to take oral testimony during this time.

After the comment period ends, the NPS will consider all public comments, revise its draft plan, and adopt a final plan that will govern the management of the Washington, DC, portion of Rock Creek Park for the next 10 to 15 years. We may never have a better opportunity to restrict automobile traffic and enhance recreational opportunities in Rock Creek Park.

The NPS's draft plan is expected to contain four different management regimes for Rock Creek Park:

- A status quo plan with no weekday restrictions on automobile traffic
- A modified status quo plan with traffic calming measures and enhanced speed limit enforcement
- Permanent recreation zones on three sections of upper Beach Drive—the same three sections that are currently closed to automobile traffic on weekends
- Weekday recreation zones on upper Beach Drive, except during rush hour

Sierra Club currently supports extending the existing weekend restrictions on automobile traffic in the three sections of Beach Drive to weekdays, so that we can all enjoy our unique, urban national park for recreation seven days a week. The Club will notify its members when the

*continued on page 7*

## Parks and Trees

### Council to Weigh in on Mayor's Klingle Plan

By Jason Broehm

On May 7, the DC City Council approved a provision attached to the Budget Support Act that requires Mayor Anthony Williams to submit his plan for a hiker/biker trail in Klingle Valley before breaking ground on the project.

The Klingle provision—inserted behind the scenes by At-Large Councilmember and Public Works and the Environment Committee Chair Carol Schwartz—stipulates that no money may be spent in the valley corridor until the Mayor obtains Council approval of his plan. One exception to this spending prohibition allows the District Division of Transportation (DDOT) to begin environmental remediation work in the valley, including for the much-needed repair of the failed storm sewer system.

At Large Councilmember Phil Mendelson led an effort to strike the

Schwartz provision from the budget bill, arguing that it is a backdoor approach intended to tie the Mayor's hands and delay the implementation of the trail proposal. Councilmembers Jack Evans (Ward 2) and Harold Brazil (At Large) backed Mendelson's motion to strike the provision, but it failed on a 3-10 vote.

Councilmember Schwartz stated that her provision does not support one side or the other on the merits of the Klingle Valley issue itself. Indeed, most Council members viewed her provision as nothing more than an assertion of Council authority to weigh in on the Mayor's proposal. Because of this perspective, several Council members who clearly support keeping Klingle Road closed to motor vehicles and building a hiker/biker trail backed the provision.

At the same time, the language of the Schwartz provision has clearly

been imprinted with the sentiments of Council road advocates Jim Graham (Ward 1), Adrian Fenty (Ward 4), and Linda Cropp (Council Chair), and reveals a hidden pro-road agenda. For example, a second exception to the spending prohibition states that the Mayor may spend funds "to facilitate the movement of motor vehicle traffic" in the valley.

It is uncertain when the Mayor will send his plan for the hiker/biker trail to the Council for approval. In the meantime, Sierra Club will continue its efforts to build majority support on the Council for the Mayor's proposal. The fight for Klingle Valley is far from over, and we still need your help! For more information, or if you would like to get involved in this campaign, please contact campaign chair Jason Broehm, 202-299-0745 or [jason\\_broehm@hotmail.com](mailto:jason_broehm@hotmail.com).

### Rock Creek Plan



Photo from PARC.org

Many park users support closing portions of Beach Dr. to motor vehicles seven days a week.

*continued from page 6*

draft management plan is released and ask for your help in submitting comments on the plan.

For more information, or if you would like to get involved in this campaign, contact Jason Broehm at 202-299-0745 or [jason\\_broehm@hotmail.com](mailto:jason_broehm@hotmail.com). Additional information is available at the People's Alliance for Rock Creek (PARC) Web site: [www.waba.org/PARC](http://www.waba.org/PARC).

### Help Retree DC with DC Trees Inventory

By Makita Weaver

The DC Trees Inventory will locate, identify, and evaluate the health and condition of all street trees in the District of Columbia. The information gathered will form the baseline for a comprehensive strategy to restore, enhance, and protect the urban tree canopy of the District of Columbia. The data will also be used to calculate the value of the ecosystem services that trees provide to DC, particularly with regard to air and water quality.

In cooperation with the DC government, Casey Trees is leading the DC Trees Inventory. Starting in June, teams of high school students, university student interns, and community volunteers will work together to conduct the inventory. Every block in the District of Columbia will be visited to survey an estimated 100,000 trees. Information on existing trees and opportunities to plant new

trees will be recorded.

Community volunteers and interns will receive intensive training to carry out the survey during May and throughout the summer. Data will be collected using Geographic Information System-enabled handheld computers and downloaded daily. Information technology and tree professionals will provide field support and quality assurance.

In the fall, the data will be incorporated into Washington's new street tree management system and made available to District and federal agencies to aid them in planning, design, and management decisions.

Volunteers are needed to help Re-Tree DC! Contact Casey Trees at 833-4010 to find out how you can get involved in saving DC's trees.

# Environmental Justice

All stories by **Julie Eisenhardt**

## Curbing Environmental Hazards: Residents Testify, Councilmembers Commit to Action



River Terrace residents demand Council action on Pepco's Benning Road plant and the Benning Road trash transfer station at an April 24 forum.

"We're bringing this issue to the forefront. We are going to make sure that every City Council member and every Washingtonian knows about the plague of environmental health problems in River Terrace."

— Erman Clay

On Wednesday, April 24, members of the City Council came to River Terrace to hear what area residents had to say about living in the shadow of a power plant. Children, educators, residents, health professionals, and representatives of the American Cancer Society and American Lung Association testified on the health problems that have plagued the neighborhood.

"We're slowly dying here—there's no question about it," remarked George Gurley, President of the Urban Protectors. "For every person testifying, there are five more who were too sick to come out tonight."

The public hearing, organized by the River Terrace Community Organization, was part of the group's decades-long effort to have both the Pepco plant and trash transfer station closed. Following the testimony, Councilmembers were called on to make a commitment to help this campaign advance.

In front of the audience of over 150 neighborhood residents, Councilmember Kevin Chavous (Ward 7) committed to working to close the plant and station, while At Large Councilmember Mendelson committed to requiring better pollution control technology at both facilities. Council Chair Linda Cropp was also in attendance.

Last summer, River Terrace neighbor-

hood completed a door-to-door health survey that showed a childhood household asthma rate of more than 40 percent, or twice the national average. The non-scientific community survey also showed cancer and bronchitis rates far above rates for DC as a whole. Community members were especially concerned about these health issues in light of a recent American Medical Association study linking air pollution with respiratory diseases, including asthma and lung cancer.

"We're bringing this issue to the forefront," said Erman Clay of Eastland Gardens, who chaired the hearing. "We are going to make sure that every City Council member and every Washingtonian knows about the plague of environmental health problems in River Terrace."

Reverend Heath Cheek of Varick Memorial AME Zion Church opened the hearing with a prayer, and then asked that Councilmembers "hear these testimonials and take them as a call to action to have these facilities closed." As part of their ongoing efforts to achieve their goals, River Terrace residents will hold a vigil at the Pepco plant and trash transfer station, as well as a lobby day at the DC Council building on May 31 to educate members about health issues in River Terrace and the need for pollution control legislation.

Photo by Julie Eisenhardt

### Union Temple Baptist, Sierra Club Host Earth Day Forum on Environmental Justice

The environmental justice forum at Union Temple Baptist Church—the largest church in DC—was not your average Earth Day event. Jennifer Ferenstein, Sierra Club President, joined Reverend Willie Wilson, Pastor of the Union Temple Baptist Church, to explore the links between race, environment, and health. Local community leaders were present to discuss the links between environmental justice and local efforts to decrease air pollution, the contamination of waterways, and development projects that displace local people from neighborhoods.

“A clean, healthy environment is a right, whether you live in the city or in the country,” remarked Ferenstein. “We don’t need trees just for beauty—we need them to clean the air we breathe. We don’t need water just to swim in—we need it to drink. When polluting corporations release toxic chemicals into our air, they’re not just harming the air; they’re also creating asthma, bronchitis, or even cancer.”

Community leaders agreed that, taken together, their different concerns indicate a pattern that threatens the health of Washington’s African American majority. George Gurley, President of the Urban Protectors, noted that one in three students who attend the elementary school adjacent to the Pepco power plant and trash transfer station have asthma. Damon Whitehead, the Anacostia Riverkeeper, cited how billions of gallons of sewage back up regularly in what

can be called “the *other river*.” Eugene Dewitt Kinlow, president of the Far Southwest Civic Association, discussed the longstanding fight to stop a private prison, a homeless shelter, and a trash transfer station from being built in his neighborhood.

“There is an obvious correlation between the high incidence of cancer and other illnesses and the proliferation of contamination and pollution in the District of Columbia,” remarked Reverend Willie Wilson. “This situation must be addressed.”

According to a study by the United Church of Christ, African Americans nationwide are far more likely to live near polluting facilities such as chemical factories, oil refineries, power plants, and trash. As a result, African Americans have disproportionately high rates of diseases often linked to environmental hazards, including asthma and cancer.

Panelists emphasized the linkages between the environment and major health issues, and reminded attendees about how national concerns such as improving the fuel economy of cars are linked to local problems such as air pollution. Residents asked questions about DC’s drinking water quality, lead paint, asthma, the work of the Sierra Club, and the goals of the environmental movement. Importantly, the nearly 100 attendees of the Earth Day event were energized to work on environmental health issues.

### DC Village Neighbors Seek Planning Professionals

The Far Southwest Civic Association, located adjacent to DC Village, is seeking planning professionals to provide pro-bono support to the conceptual planning process for the neighborhood. The area has already been surveyed and the neighborhood has reached agreement on a set of principles for the type of development that should occur on the site.

The Civic Association is looking for people who can help turn concepts of affordable housing, good jobs, and mixed-use development into a realistic, workable site plan, which in turn can be used to contract developers. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Far Southwest Civic Association President Eugene Dewitt Kinlow at 202-563-2131.



Julie Eisenhardt and friends, Earth Day 2001

### Moving On...

### Thanks, Julie!

**Julie Eisenhardt,**

our capable EJ organizer in Washington, left earlier this month to participate in human rights organizing in Florida. During her two years working in this new program, Julie was a virtual dynamo of innovative programs and ideas. With the volunteers and interns she helped recruit, she carried out most of the EJ programs you’ve read about through several issues of this publication. We will miss Julie, and we wish her the best in her future endeavors.

### Wanted:

### EJ Organizer

The Club is currently seeking a new organizer for this campaign. It is a 12-month appointment to help develop grassroots strategies and conservation priorities to confront environmental injustice. For a full job description, contact Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program, 2568 Martin Luther King, Jr. Ave, SE, Washington, DC 20020. Phone 202-610-3360, fax 202-610-3361.



## the planet newsletter

# ClubBeat

by Sarah Wootton

### The Right Place at the Right Time



"Mr. President, we do not need to drill the Arctic." That's how Ed Hall, a Portland, Ore., firefighter and Club member, greeted President George W. Bush in January.

When Hall volunteered at Ground Zero in New York City, he never guessed it would lead to a face-to-face meeting with President Bush.

But Hall, who helped New York City firefighters dig through the Twin Towers rubble, was one of four local firefighters asked to greet Bush on the runway when the President visited Portland.

As he shook hands with Bush, Hall took advantage of his five seconds of face time with the President.

"...Telling [the President] not to drill in the Arctic ... was the shortest, most concise statement that could fit in the time I had, and it also is a top priority issue for the environmental community."

Apparently it was not what Bush expected to hear.

"He kept his composure, but in his eyes was something like, 'How did you get in here?'" Hall doesn't expect to meet with a Republican president again anytime soon.

### In Step in Washington



With the help of Club environmental justice organizer **Julie Eisenhardt**, more than 100 residents of Washington, D.C.'s River Terrace neighborhood marched in support of closing a nearby oil-burning power plant and trash transfer station. A recent health study indicated that the facilities were responsible for the high asthma and cancer rates in the neighborhood; one of every two kids has asthma. The neighbors are pushing for a federal scientific health study that will make a compelling case for plant closure.

### Bears Repeating

The Wyoming Department of Game and Fish didn't count on Wyoming Chapter member Janet Maxwell when it opened a public comment period on its draft management plan for the grizzly bear. (Wyoming is one of five states that must

come up with a management plan for the bear when it loses its status as a threatened species, expected to happen in five to 10 years.)

Worried that the plan did not provide enough protection for the bear outside its recovery area, Maxwell wrote a letter urging Game and Fish to provide better safeguards. But she didn't stop there. She headed to Yellowstone National Park with two tables, a van and six colleagues and met thousands of visitors, encouraging many of them to sign comments asking for better protections for the grizzly. At the end of the month, thanks to Maxwell's efforts, the [Wyoming Chapter](#) hand-delivered 6,000 signed comments to Game and Fish; 97 percent of the comments the state received favored more protections.

Regardless, Game and Fish ordered an independent poll of 1,500 Wyoming citizens to determine whether the conservationist comments truly reflected the state's majority. Poll results showed that 76 percent wanted greater protections. Another draft with improved grizzly protections should be out in February.

### Graphically Speaking



When not designing the official graphic for the Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games, graphic artist Michael Schwab might be seen at the Sierra Club headquarters in San Francisco. Well, maybe not the award-winning artist himself, but the limited-edition, silk-screened print of the hiker (seen here) he designed for the Club.

Schwab, who lives in Marin County, counts Apple, The National Parks, Sundance, the San Francisco Opera - and now the Club - among his clients.

Schwab donated 120 signed and numbered prints to the Club, five of which were auctioned off as part of eBay's Sept. 11 Auction for America fundraiser. The remaining copies are available for sale in the Club's store. [Find out more.](#)

### Jump on a Bus, Gus

A weather inversion arrived in Salt Lake City just in time to disappoint many visitors in town for the winter Olympics -- the spectacular Wasatch Mountains that tower over the city can't be seen

and there is a brown haze as far as the eye can see.

"It's been like this for a week," says Marc Heileson of the Sierra Club's Southwest office. "There's a warning out that people over 65 shouldn't be outside."

In a state where the 30-year transportation plan calls for highways over rail at a 5 to 1 ratio, cleaning up Salt Lake City's air is an uphill battle. To promote public transit and ultimately clear the air of pollution, the Utah Chapter is posting more than 50 billboards and busboards on light rail trains, city buses and along the city's busy streets.

Perhaps the signs -- and the Olympic haze -- will convince Utahns to "hack" away at the state's pollution by using public transportation more often.

### Honors in Order

Vicky Husband, Conservation Chair for the [British Columbia Chapter](#), knows that you don't have to compete in the Olympics to win medals. A lifelong volunteer, Husband is one of Canada's most active and well-known environmentalists, and in January, she was awarded the Order of Canada, the country's most illustrious award.

The award, which honors 136 citizens each year, follows on the heels of the Order of British Columbia that Husband received in 2000.

Husband, who helped establish the Clayoquot Sound U.N. Biosphere Reserve and Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary, was given the award largely thanks to her "tireless" work to protect British Columbia's natural heritage, particularly coastal rainforests.

Photo of EJ activists courtesy Julie Eisenhardt

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**SPECIAL  
REPORT**

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**APPENDIX F**

# SIERRA

Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet

**WHEN IGNORANCE  
IS BLISS**  
for the Bush  
Administration

**FIGHTING  
PREJUDICE**  
and Pollution

**MEXICO'S**  
Green  
Cuisine

**TIDEPools**  
The Lure of  
Steinbeck's  
California Coast

\$2.95 / CANADA \$3.50  
MAY/JUNE 2004



THE MAGAZINE OF THE SIERRA CLUB

## Diversity at Work

# From Urban Blight to Urban Might

*White visitors to Washington, D.C., are often cautioned to stay away from the low-income, predominantly African-American communities in the southeastern part of the city. But in the late 1990s, Sierra Club members ventured into the Anacostia neighborhoods to help local residents keep a private prison out of their public parkland. The collaboration led to a victory in 1999, when the zoning commission rejected the prison proposal. It also made it a little easier for Julie Eisenhardt, a white Wisconsinite with a degree in medieval history, to begin her work as the Sierra Club's first environmental-justice organizer in the nation's capital. Eisenhardt was introduced around the neighborhood by Eugene Dewitt Kinlow, an African-American politico from Anacostia who worked on the prison campaign. "I could tell people that when we fought the prison, an important organization that helped us succeed was the Sierra Club," says Kinlow, who recognized in Eisenhardt a fellow fighter for social justice.*

*"Eugene put his reputation on the line by getting involved with all this," says Eisenhardt. "If anyone asked, 'Who's this little blond girl?' he was the one who had to answer for me." The risk paid off. Eisenhardt forged relationships around the neighborhood, paving the way for an ongoing partnership with community groups. When Eisenhardt moved on to the Sierra Club's environmental-justice committee, the Club hired longtime Anacostia activist Linda Fennell to continue the fight against neighborhood blight, unequal levels of services, and air pollution from nearby highways and power plants.*

### Eugene Dewitt Kinlow Washington, D.C., activist

"Our community has the largest percentage of people who are unemployed and on public assistance in D.C., and the largest population of kids in poverty. It also has little or no commerce. We had one grocery store, but that closed about five years ago. So, frankly, many environmental issues are subsumed under more immediate ones—how am I going to keep

a roof over my head, how am I going to feed my kids and keep them safe from crime? It can be a difficult veil to lift.

"So it was incumbent upon Julie to look at the community and try to see it through their eyes—and then get them to look at things through an environmental lens. When you've got broken bottles in the neighborhood, illegal dumping, and trash in your river so it's not fishable or swimmable, those are environmental problems too.

"Of course it was difficult at first. Residents are very cautious about outsiders. People have come in and promised us many things and we don't ever receive them. They want access to our leaders and our political support, and then they just abandon us after they get what they want. But for the Sierra Club to put its office in the heart of Anacostia demonstrated a commitment right

off the bat. Julie showed that she was real and that the commitment of the Club was true.

"Julie was dealing with local groups that had great ideas, but lacked resources. They could have a protest, but they didn't have a fax machine to get a press release out, or even a computer to make a flyer. The Sierra Club did, and they opened their doors to us. That meant a lot.

"About a year and a half after we defeated the prison, there was a proposal to put a trash-transfer station in our ward. They always want to put the most negative things in our community. But since we had respectability from the prison fight, and the resources from the Sierra Club to assist us, we were able to say no. We've been accepting everyone else's sewage and junk for so long, and we will not accept any more."

Washington, D.C., activist Eugene Dewitt Kinlow helped keep a prison from being built on waterfront parkland enjoyed by community members and bald eagles alike.



DARROW MONTGOMERY

**Julie Eisenhardt:**  
former Sierra Club EJ organizer  
Washington, D.C.

"When I walked into a room in the neighborhood, it was easy to tell that I wasn't from there. It's important to be honest about who you are, and what your motivations are, and to not try to act like you understand what people are going through or what their experiences have been. Folks in these neighborhoods have had dogooders come in for generations saying they're going to rescue them. So people perceived us with a certain amount of skepticism.

"Too many times, we're in such a hurry to get things done, we forget that we're human and we need to relate on a personal level. There are a lot of older women involved in community-building east of the river, and two or three times I made the mistake of assuming that I had to slow down or talk louder, and kind of explain things,

but these women were just absolute fireballs. I learned very quickly that they don't need to be talked down to.

"We had a number of social events. At one, we had the garden-club presidents from both Anacostia and Georgetown. People associate Anacostia with poverty and drug-dealing, but here's an older woman putting planters out on the street and flowers in the corner park. She's trying to do the same thing as the wealthy people from Georgetown.

"It's not like we had to convert people. These folks already cared about environmental issues because their kids have asthma attacks, they're seeing lead poisoning affect the ability of students to learn. When you live in a city, that's really what the environment is. We just had to convince folks that the Sierra Club was there to help them on *their* issues.

"A lot of roadblocks come up in this kind of work, and we can't change the way we were raised or our differ-

"Who's this little blond girl?" Environmental-justice organizer Julie Eisenhardt.



ent backgrounds, but we can discuss the preconceived notions that we bring to the table. We can also be geographically diverse in where we hold events and make our meetings transportation-accessible, with childcare and some snacks, so as many people as possible can get there. There are a lot of ways to get rid of the logistical things so we can get to the real stuff." ■

## DIVIDED WE FELL

A campaign that was just too white.

By Justin Ruben

In the late 1990s, I spent three years working in California's Central Valley, one of the nation's most important agricultural regions, with a large coalition dedicated to ending dangerous pesticide use. Although "minorities" compose a majority of the population in both the valley and the state overall—and Latino farmworkers and gardeners are heavily affected by the chemicals—we were governed by an all-white steering committee, and none of our other leaders were people of color.

When I moved there, the state was debating whether to tighten drinking-water standards for DBCP, a soil fumigant linked to cancer and sterility. Banned in California since 1977 and in the United States since 1985, DBCP still contaminates many municipal water sources, and is allowed in tap water at levels our coalition believed to be dangerous. An alliance of water utilities and pesticide manufacturers argued that stricter regulations would result in higher water bills, imposing a burden on poor families. Environmental groups, including my own, pointed out that the state could provide financial assistance for communities, or initiate legal action against the chemical companies on their behalf. (About 20 percent of the contaminated communities already had legal settlements with the makers of DBCP that probably would have required the manufacturers to pay for additional cleanup.) Mostly, though, we ignored the cost and focused on the health risks of taking no action.

When our delegation of activists showed up at a hearing in Fresno, we were surprised to find that the opposition was represented by a group of African-American physicians. The doctors had been rallied by the industry alliance, which

had convinced them that tighter standards would take an economic toll on poor African-American communities. In order to boost turnout, industry had sponsored a barbecue outside the hearing for the families of the black physicians, who then testified inside that anyone concerned about poor people and African Americans should oppose tighter regulations on DBCP. Ultimately, state regulators agreed, and left the standard unchanged.

We made two big mistakes. We failed to emphasize potential economic solutions, and we had little connection to local black and Latino communities. As a result, our industry opponents were able to successfully pit environmentalists against people of color and the poor.

When environmentalists ignore the impact of race on organizing, we fail to gain the active support of large communities of color that agree with us on many issues. Roughly 30 percent of the U.S. population is non-white, but our ranks don't reflect that, and neither do our priorities. If we take seriously the need to understand how racial inequality manifests itself in our society and in our own movement—and the need to make concrete changes to our organizations—then our movement will be a more hospitable place for people of color to work, and we will be less likely to promote policies that deepen inequality. Then we will stand a far better chance of building a world where we treat the earth, and each other, with honor, reverence, and respect. ■

**Our industry opponents were able to successfully pit environmentalists against people of color and the poor.**

JUSTIN RUBEN works as a labor organizer in New Haven, Connecticut.

## 9. Environmental Justice Report

President Cox – It is important for the Board to be brought up to date with the Environmental Justice Program. So much has happened. This is a vibrant, successful, growing program. The Board can affirm its work through adoption of the Environmental Justice Principles.

Kristen Replogle, EJ Task Force Chair – Thank you's to the Board of Directors for its support and efforts to date, Marti Sinclair who did the majority of effort on the Principles, and the Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizing Program, including Field Office Director Jim Price, Senior Organizer John McCown, the other organizers, staff and volunteers for allowing me to be part of this journey.

I would like to begin with an update on our current sites, share with you our plans for expansion, and lay out what I see as some of the challenges and opportunities ahead of us. Let me begin in the east.

**Julie Eisenhardt** has been supporting communities throughout Washington, DC. One of her projects involves assisting the Southwest Hill Association in writing and conducting a basic health survey for area residents. Surveying for asthma, cancers, upper respiratory disease, and mental illness will indicate whether there is a need for further scientific research. She organized and helped educate community members around the Title V permitting process for the Blue Plains Wastewater Treatment Facility. Other efforts include supporting communities fighting the location of a trash transfer station in their neighborhood. She has teamed with other groups for a summit on trash transfer issues to be held next Saturday. Finally, she has organized and hosted several educational events, and is co-sponsoring another one on organizing skills in March.

Rhonda Anderson, our organizer located in Detroit, may have only been on the job since August, but she's quickly gotten involved in all kinds of projects, several of them focused on

Detroit's children. She is actively working with teachers interested in bringing EJ into the classroom whether as a class project or as a part of the curriculum. Rhonda is also seeking to bring together communities from opposite sides of town who are struggling with the same problem of illegal dumping of contaminated waste in their neighborhoods. Other issues in which she is involved include major development projects displacing communities around the city, and investigating the possibility of developing a tree memorial program. This would allow family members whose loved ones have been killed on the streets of Detroit to plant a tree in their memory.

Rita Harris has been supporting communities in Memphis concerned about air quality. One of her major efforts has been supporting the Douglass community's campaign against the re-permitting of Velsicol Chemical Company's incinerator. A recent announcement by the company that they are 95% certain that they will NOT seek to renew their permit was an enormous victory for the community. This decision came about in part because of the thorough organizing and public hearing presence the Sierra Club was able to facilitate. A victory party was held on February 8th. Something else happened that day. A 45,000-gallon tank of dicyclopentadiene exploded at Velsicol. None of the company's boasted-about emergency alert systems worked. None. This drove home the need for a coordinated effort around emergency planning and risk management, themes Rita will be picking up. Rita also organizes and conducts toxic tours in Memphis. Her tour is featured in the *EJ Times* you received today, and I encourage you to read about it there.

Jessy Cadenas has been primarily involved in two issues in Los Angeles. First, the Belmont Learning Complex. This is a school situated on a contaminated site. Unfortunately, the State of California has denied community requests for an environmental assessment of the site, preferring to simply shut it down. Jessy has worked to support this community in their demands for full disclosure on the site's contamination. A thorough and open process is fundamental to public participation in any meaningful way. She has also been working with the community of Inglewood as they seek to protect their quality of life and their neighborhood from expansion of the LAX airport. Jessy has also been contacted by other chapters in her regions that are looking for guidance on their EJ outreach.

I had the opportunity to speak with each of these women in recent days, and I continue to be impressed and inspired by their dedication to this effort. I asked each of them what adoption of these Principles today would mean for them. They all said the same thing: these Principles give them greater credibility and confidence in their outreach. It cements our dedication to this cause.

In addition to the efforts of these organizers, the Grassroots Organizing Program managed an EJ Special Projects Discretionary Fund. These dollars went to Sierra Club entities in places not served by an organizer who were working in partnership with affected communities. A few examples:

The Atlantic Chapter received funds to help cover expenses for a New York City Waterfront

Tour. This Open Space Tour of waterfront communities served to highlight for community leaders and public officials the need for green space and developed waterfront areas for low income communities.

The Pennsylvania Chapter requested funds to develop and produce two publications to inform rural communities of southwest Pennsylvania and the West Virginia panhandle of the negative impacts of longwall mining.

The Delta Chapter was able to continue its support of the Norco community, whom many of you remember from the tour two years ago, in their struggle to gain relocation away from the Shell Chemical Plant.

And a proposal from the Northern Plains RCC was funded to assist in organizing Native American communities to solidify opposition around a proposed DM&E railroad corridor through the sacred lands of Pine Ridge.

Again, this is just a sampling of the approximately 12 proposals we were able to fund in 2000. I feel very fortunate to have been a part of the proposal review committee for this fund. I learned more about what our various entities are doing, and I also learned the need to be sensitive to the needs of our community partners. I believe it is important to share with you a couple of the major criterion used in evaluating these proposals, as they go to the heart of the Program's philosophy.

1. We looked to ensure the problem identified has been defined by our community partners as important to them. This is not a recruitment tool.
2. We attempted to ensure that community leadership was instrumental in the development of the proposal, and that the campaigns would be led by the communities.
3. We looked most favorable upon proposals where Club staff and volunteers were working in partnership with suffering communities. We did not generally support proposals that were primarily intended for salaries. While we recognize and appreciate everything our talented staff members do, our primary goal is to bring Sierra Club volunteers into direct contact and working partnerships with suffering communities. We learn through doing.

Now that you have a better idea of where we've been, I'd like to shift to where we're going. There are wonderful new dimensions being added to the Program this year, which will increase our depth of support to low income and people of color communities. We are adding a full-time media person. The availability of these skills will increase the success of our campaigns as well as raise the visibility of EJ in national media circles, allowing the voices of our partnering communities to be better heard by the general public. We are also adding an attorney. This critical position will serve to provide a range of services, from filing lawsuits to simply answering such questions as "Can they really do that?" Everyone in the Program is very excited about these soon-to-be-filled positions.

Another exciting project being undertaken is a Corporate Accountability Media Campaign. In a joint effort with the media department, and especially Kim Haddow, this project is still in the planning stages where we are attempting to see who else has attempted such a project and what their results were; develop a set of criteria for selecting a "bad actor"; and develop a list of potential targets to shine the light of justice upon. The goal is to identify a corporation with a

historical record of inflicting abuse upon the planet and her people, which may also be vulnerable to this type of pressure.

Finally, we have added two new sites, both of which I am very excited about. The first is in the Southwest, where our Organizer, Andy Bessler, who you may know from the successful Save the Peaks EPEC campaign, will be supporting Native American communities throughout the region struggling with water quality issues. The second site is central Appalachia. This site, instead of immediately beginning a search for an organizer, will begin by hosting a series of "listening sessions" that will bring communities suffering from the devastation of mountaintop removal coal mining together with Sierra Club members. Out of these sessions will come an agenda defined by the communities and a workplan that centers on how Sierra Club will support the communities in their campaigns. It is also hoped that during this process, members of these affected communities will be identified as candidates for this organizer position. These two sites, being rural and regional in approach, complement the current urban-focused work begun a year ago. Another plus is expanding our experience to include new cultures, and new perspectives.

While these new sites are important to the Program for the differences they bring to our table, they are also important because of the characteristics they share with the work in progress. Those include:

- \* understanding that these campaigns are defined and led by the people directly affected;
- \* again, understanding that this is not a recruitment tool to get low-income and people of color communities to work on "our issues";
- \* and also understanding that, ultimately, the organizer will come from the partnering community.

We're doing something revolutionary here. Something no one else is doing. We are putting resources, financial and technical, directly into suffering communities.

Finally, I would like to share some of my thoughts regarding some of the challenges and opportunities that are before us.

First, the Sierra Club culture: We have an incredible track record on a wide variety of environmental issues. I am proud of that. But winning these campaigns has necessitated developing a style of communication that is aggressive and frequently confrontational. We are trained to persuade others to see our point of view. In much of our coalition work, Sierra Club members are in leadership positions there, as well. As a result, we get used to "speaking on behalf of" others, or viewing ourselves as protectors, or environmental guardian angels. Unfortunately, these communication styles are often at odds with that is needed for our EJ outreach. This organization is filled with eloquent speakers and gifted strategists. But in our EJ partnerships, we need to step back, and listen. Participate in the conversation, but not direct it. Give our partnering communities the opportunity to tell us what they need from us, and then do our best to get it done.

Second, the myth: There is still a segment of our membership that equates environmental justice with social welfare. It is not. It is a way to go about our conservation work that seeks to protect not only our beautiful earth and the wondrous diversity of life she supports, but also seeks to protect the dignity of human life, and the fundamental rights to a clean and healthful

environment and to participate in the decisions that affect them so profoundly.

Finally, the bridge: We often characterize the efforts of our organizers as that of being a bridge between Sierra Club and communities suffering from environmental injustice. I like to clarify that by saying that we don't mean having comminutes pulling on your hands and the Club pulling on your feet while everyone else walks all over you. It means reaching inward to hold our membership with one hand, reaching outward with the other to suffering communities, and gently bringing the two together.

We have work to do in both directions on this bridge. I love the Sierra Club, so I don't criticize her casually. However, in my involvement with the Program, I have experienced firsthand racist and class-ist remarks and actions from other members. None of us are perfect in this respect, and I point fingers at no one. We must all be loving yet firm in our efforts to encourage our members to be more careful with their words.

As we work to build this bridge outward, it is important for us to remember that we are often dealing with issues of historical exploitation of that land and its people. These communities have often been abandoned by other national environmental organizations and the regulatory agencies designed to protect their interests. To overcome the resulting mistrust held by these communities, we must demonstrate repeated acts of trust. And we do that by following through on everything we commit to. As we make room for these communities to become empowered, we will gain their respect, and they will become trusted allies in the long run.

We need your help. We need you to assist us in embracing these opportunities and moving the Club farther down the road of environmental justice. We need you to help redirect our culture, to help de-bunk the myth, and yes, to help build and sustain the bridge.

This is an historic day for Sierra Club. I am very blessed to be a part of it. Let us celebrate what we have learned and what we have accomplished. And let us celebrate the opportunities that lie ahead.

President Cox – We sense a shift in our understanding, awareness and culture as result of the Environmental Justice Organizing Program and in communities. People respond when the Board states their commitment and speaks in an affirmative way. Adopting these principles matters.

Director Aumen – We appreciate Kirsten's perspective. Since we began, we have adopted principles, had great donor funding, the newsletter and great volunteers and staff. Eight years ago, there was mistrust on the part of the communities as they wondered why we wanted to be involved. We offered to do what they needed us to do and asked to be judged by our work. The face of the Club has changed so that we do things relevant to the diverse society we exist in and it has a huge impact on the diversity of Club.

Director Fahn – Kirsten Repogle has spoken eloquently. Her remarks should be put into a status report and made available to our partners.

Carl Pope – This is not our organization's first foray into Environmental Justice. In the late 80s we did less well. Our work was characterized by bold rhetoric and small follow-through.