



SIERRA CLUB
GEORGIA CHAPTER

Savannah River Group

July - August 2026 Newsletter

The Sierra Club mission statement is to Protect, Enjoy, and Explore the planet.

Greetings! Summer is upon us and while we expect it to get hot here in and around Augusta, there are record breaking temperatures across the US and in Europe - a village in southern France set the country's highest temperature ever recorded on 28 June at 113°F. Europe now holds the honor of being the fastest warming continent. What's more we are entering a "super" El Niño period, so get prepared for some extreme weather events wherever you may go this summer.

On Saturday, 27 June, SRG Outreach chair, Matt Maurer, led a "tabling" team at the 2026 Augusta Pride Festival. We received a tremendous amount of interest all day long, educating folks about the Sierra Club conservation efforts, SRG outings and meetings, and collecting over 90 email addresses. The "Make America Green Again" stickers were a hit, but the most interest was generated by our paper weights. That's right, it seems foil wrapped bricks with colorful duct tape are really eye catchers. Please consider volunteering for a time slot at our next tabling by contacting Matt (preferably text him at 317-691-5547) .

Get outside, enjoy nature's beauty and stay hydrated.

Jeffrey Holder, Chair

Recent Meetings and Outings



The May and June outings were follow-ups to our monthly meetings. Our outings leaders Cheryl and Cathy held an edible wild plants talk in May and then led a walk at Audubon's Siver Bluff Sanctuary to hunt the plants in the wild.



Dr Donna Wear, in June, talked about Gopher Tortoises at our monthly meeting and we then hunted for the elusive tortoises at the McDuffie Public Fishing Area.



Upcoming Events

The Savannah River Group always goes into hiatus for the months of July and August. This gives our members and organizers time to relax and enjoy summer trips with their families. Enjoy the summer but stay cool, whether it's at the beach, the lake, the mountains, or in the back yard kiddy pool. We will start back with our meetings and outings in September. Our first meeting will include an ice cream social and a guest speaker. Stay tuned to our September and October newsletter to find out more.

4,6, and 7 July, Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) 8:30am-12:00pm: Savannah River Group has adopted 10 streams in Richmond and Columbia counties which are monitored every month for pollution levels as indicated by dissolved O₂, pH, phosphate, temperature and macroinvertebrates. Come join us and be a part of the monitoring of *your* fresh water. For more information, email Stephen Heyl at Stephen@woodhurstarchitects.com.

1,3, and 4 August, Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) 8:30am-12:00pm

26 September, 10am -12 noon: Birthday Bash for Carol Ruckdeschel in St. Mary's, GA. More information about this event in this newsletter.

Needed Volunteers!

Executive Committee – Candidates

We are looking for candidates for our Savannah River Group *Executive Committee*. The Executive Committee (ExCom) is the main governing body for our group, focusing mostly on local and some state issues. We meet bimonthly six times a year. If you would like more information or to throw your hat in the ring for this election, contact **Linda @ msmcb@outlook.com**

Volunteers Needed for Monthly Meetings

Savannah River Group currently offers hybrid options at our nine (9) monthly meetings so people may attend in-person or on Zoom. **We need 2 or more volunteers to run Zoom from 6:30 pm – 7:30 pm.** Having more than one person gives you the flexibility to choose which meeting you could commit to (a total of 9 meetings/year). The meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month except for July, August, and December. It does not matter your age; in fact, we hope that some younger folks, including someone in their teens, would like to volunteer to do this and then be able to add it to your resume for future employment! Please contact Linda for further information at **msmcb@outlook.com**

Invitation to a Birthday Bash – September 26, 2026

Please save September 26, 2026, for a special community gathering this September in St. Mary's, Georgia — a birthday celebration honoring *Carol Ruckdeschel*. The event will take place from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon.

For more than five decades, Carol has called Cumberland Island home. As a biologist, naturalist, environmental activist, and author, she has devoted her life to understanding and protecting the natural world around her. She co-founded the Cumberland Island Museum in 1985, organized one of the earliest sea turtle stranding networks on the Georgia coast, and helped establish the Cumberland Island National Seashore Wilderness designation. Her field journals so impressed curators at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History that they drove to Cumberland Island to meet her — beginning a relationship that would result in over 600 specimens and field notes being accepted into the Smithsonian's permanent collection. Her research helped crack the code on the life cycle of loggerhead sea turtles and advanced our understanding of marine mammals along the entire Southeast coast.

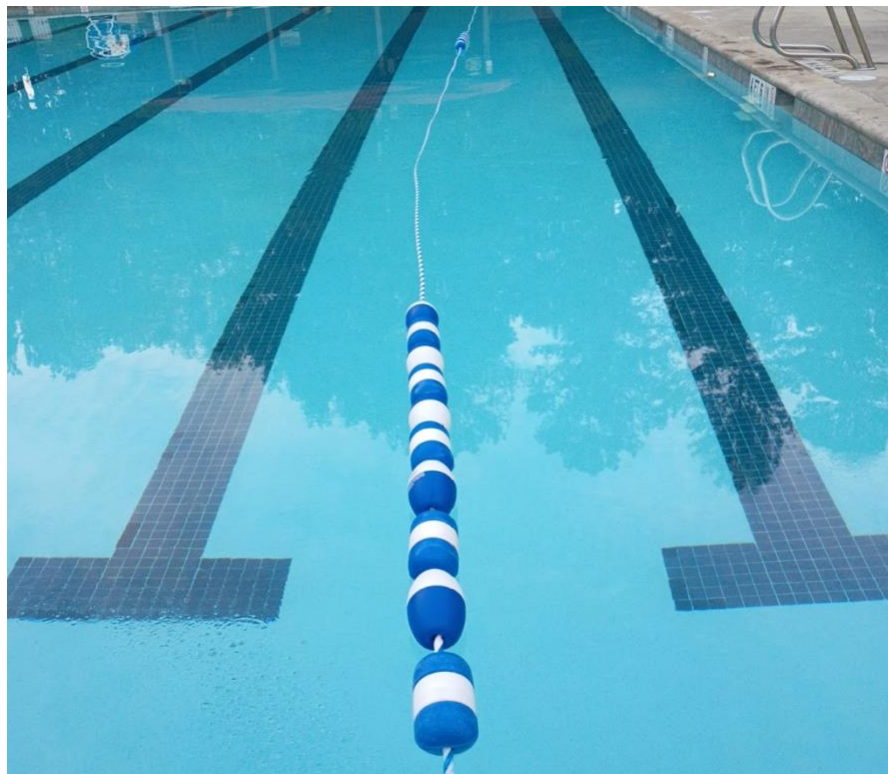
Wayne Clough, former Secretary of the Smithsonian and former president of Georgia Tech, has said that Carol Ruckdeschel is "the greatest coastal scientist in Georgia's

history." Often called the Jane Goodall of sea turtles, and the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings of Cumberland Island, Carol has inspired scientists, conservationists, writers, and everyday nature lovers across generations — all while living with rare simplicity and conviction on the barrier island she has always been so passionate about.

This celebration is about more than a birthday. It is a tribute to a life fully given to the natural world, and a recognition of the many people Carol has inspired along the way. Carol has spent her life reminding us that wild places and wild creatures need tireless, devoted voices. On this occasion, we get to thank one of the best of those voices — and show her just how far her influence has reached.

Deep Dive on the Data Center Dilemma

By Marlena Bergeron, M.Ed.
Political Chair



By now, you've heard about data centers: either because one is being built in your county or because one's being built in your friends' and families' county, and they won't stop talking about it. If only data center development took a summer break!

The A.I. roll-out doesn't always mention the back end of its operations. We know Artificial Intelligence or Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) is a tool that lets us forecast more accurate hurricane paths and more quickly interpret CAT scans for cancer. It's a tool that can even help us employ more renewables and reduce climate change impacts.

But just like any new piece of equipment or machinery, you wouldn't push someone on it without proper training, without going over the precautions, whether they're an adult or a child. While A.I. is not a living thing, like a horse that you need to learn how to ride and take care of, it is made up of human inputs that can be an amalgam of our best ideas or our worst intentions.

Or more likely, just easy ways out of doing work or passing time. Fast answers are delivered without hesitation or double checking for accuracy, bias, and ethics.

---An innocuous example of bias, when you ask ChatGPT to generate a stock image of a "teacher," you get a young woman with glasses and a blond ponytail. When you ask for a "professor," you get a stately gentleman with a tie and a beard surrounded by overfilled bookcases.---

Sometimes, you get content that is strip-mining someone else's hard work (for example, there are many lawsuits and ethics questions about AI generated art that draws from real artists).

A.I.-generated material can have rippling and crippling consequences. Data Centers can do the same, especially when it comes to the environment. **Do Data Centers use a lot of water?** Yes. Depending on whether they use open cooling (evaporation) or closed-loop cooling systems (mixing 50% of water with a chemical coolant) determines how much water is used. Golf courses also use an obscene amount of water. However, data centers are being built on a scale never seen before in civilization (and over the past few decades golf courses have strived to reduce their water use - especially in low-water locations).

...Which begs the question, why are data centers which need to be constantly cooled being built in historically the hottest parts of the country, and in some places, where there are already drought conditions and water shortages!!!!???? (... I'm guessing you've guessed 'Cheap Land and Money!' by now...)

- Data centers currently don't have to disclose their water consumption. When Rep Debbie Buckner's legislation to require data centers to be more transparent about how much water is used, power is used, and property taxes are being paid (HB 528 "High Use Facilities Transparency Act"), it was derailed by other representatives before it became law.
- Do you turn the water off when you brush your teeth? It's such a small amount, but it matters to us to be conservative with our natural resources. Being a mindful user of A.I. means drafting and consolidating prompts before entering them to

reduce water consumption needed for cooling, even though individual users of A.I. are just a 'drop in the bucket.'

What we can do as starters?

Change your search engine to a non-A.I. format, like DuckDuckGo, since, for example, Google Copilot defaults to using A.I. for every search.

- Use -AI at the end of your search to tell any browser to stop using AI
- But most importantly you can demand that technology companies innovate and implement energy reducing algorithms and techniques. Just like how we all used to turn off the lights in our homes but when we all switched to LED light bulbs our energy use plummeted. Real change requires innovation from the AI companies.
- **Educate yourself about what's happening**
 - A 2.5 million square foot facility like Meta's Stanton Springs Data Center in Morgan County, uses 1-5 million gallons of water a day, about 10% of the county's water supply. White Oak Technology Park in Columbia County, Georgia, is proposed to be 8 million square feet and hasn't disclosed water estimates. For reference, 5 million gallons of daily water is a town of about 50,000 households-worth of water consumption. For more information go to [Meta's Georgia Data Center Water Crisis Explained](#)
 - Some data centers have illegally tapped into water lines to quench their thirst, taking in almost 30 million gallons and depriving the municipality of 44 Olympic-sized pools' worth of groundwater recharging ([Pressure](#)) We know them as QTS. They hosted a public meeting in June to engage the public and win back their trust.
 - From [Georgia water and environmental permits for AI data centers](#) · [Compute Law Blog](#):

8. Q: How much water does a typical AI data center use in Georgia?

A: Usage varies widely by size and cooling technology. Among the 16 disclosed Ocmulgee basin projects, the average is about 0.75 million gallons per day per project. In the Chattahoochee basin, Project Sail in Coweta County is estimated at 6 million gallons per day. [Chattahoochee Riverkeeper](#)

- - Staying current is a challenge but the critical key for making sure data centers are good neighbors is for us to be able to hold them accountable. It is our job to show up at city and county meetings, zoning meetings, public hearings and demand transparency, accountability, and sustainability.
 - **The Sierra Club** strives to keep everyone informed as more data center news and projects unfold. Read more at [Wading into Data Centers | Sierra Club](#)

Your Savannah River Group Leadership

Executive Committee (Excom)

Chair – Jeffrey Holder jeffreyholder1978@comcast.net

Treasurer – Moira Nonnweiler moiranonnweiler@gmail.com

Secretary – Chris Maurer keepwell85@gmail.com

Member at Large - Jean Yarsawich Jeanyars@gmail.com

Member at Large - Marlena Bergeron mmwbergeron@hotmail.com

Member at Large - Matt Maurer 99mmaurer@gmail.com

Chapter Delegate – Jean Yarsawich Jeanyars@gmail.com Alternate Chapter Delegate
- Linda McBurney msmcb@outlook.com

Committee Chairs

Outings Chair – Cathy Black sonnyandcathyblack@gmail.com

Conservation Chair – Jeffrey Holder jeffreyholder1978@comcast.net

Political Chair – Marlena Bergeron mmwbergeron@hotmail.com

Newsletter Editor – Cathy Black sonnyandcathyblack@gmail.com

Outreach Coordinator – Matt Maurer 99mmaurer@gmail.com

Webmaster – Charlotte Gardner vern.gardner445@comcast.net

Membership Services Chair – Bill Jackson billjakson01@gmail.com

Adopt-a-Stream Coordinator – Stephen Heyl stephen@woodhurstarchitects.com

Please contact any of your leadership team to get involved.

Visit our Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/savannahrivergroup>.

Visit our Meetup Page: <https://www.meetup.com/georgia-sierra-club-savannah-river-group-augusta-ga/>

You can contact the Savannah River Group via our email:

SRGsierraclub@gmail.com

P.S. - If you ever need to contact the Savannah River Group by "snail mail," you can reach us at: Savannah River Group, Sierra Club, PO Box 14463, Augusta, GA 30919

*The Savannah River Excom Committee meets 6 times a year. The next meeting will be August 5th at 6:30pm. Contact Jeffrey Holder at jeffreyholder1978@comcast.net for the location.

Join the Sierra Club today and receive a free introductory offer!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please select a membership Level:

Individual Membership

Joint Membership

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☐ Regular \$39.

☐ Supporting \$60

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☐ Senior/Student/Limited income \$25

☐ Life \$1000

☐ Regular joint \$49

☐ Supporting joint \$68

☐ Contributing Joint \$128

☐ Joint \$25

☐ Life Joint \$1250

Enclose a Check and mail to:

Sierra Club, P.O. Box 421041 Palm Coast, FL 32142

Please include code **F94Q W 3411**

86¢ of every dollar donated goes straight to the implementation of conservation programs. This can include campaigns to protect and restore habitats, lobbying for environmental justice, and litigating against entities that are destroying our land, air, and water.

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