



August/September 2026 Newsletter

Falls of the James Group

September 8th FOJG Program - Sierra Club Chapter and FOJG Updates



Help make the world spin in the right direction at our September 8th program on Sierra Club Advocacy updates at the Science Museum of Virginia. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

9/8/26 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm Sierra Club Chapter and FOJG Updates with Connor Kish, Director of the VA Chapter, Billy Davies, Grassroots Program Lead, and FOJG leaders Lee Williams, FOJG Advocacy Chair and Glen Besa, FOJG ExCom member. Science Museum of Virginia R F & P Forum, 2500 W Broad St, Richmond, VA 23220.

Start the new season and learn about what the Sierra Club is doing statewide and locally. Staff from the Virginia Chapter Sierra Club will share news on continued advocacy efforts throughout the state as well as upcoming legislation.

Falls of the James Group (FOJG) Sierra Club volunteers will share updates from the past year's advocacy work as well as updates on continued community engagement and new opportunities to advocate for local issues.

Jamie Hongkham, Director of Guest Services for the Science Museum of Virginia, will share exciting news and updates happening at the museum.

10/13/26 FOJG Program - Data Center Updates

October 13, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm – Data Centers and Virginia's Resources: Water, Energy, and Community Impacts with Dr. Mary Finley-Brook at the University of Richmond and Tim Cywinski, Communications Director of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter. Science Museum of Virginia R F & P Forum, 2500 W Broad St, Richmond, VA 23220.

As Virginia continues to attract large-scale data center development, communities across Central Virginia—including Henrico, Hanover, Goochland, Chesterfield, and Petersburg—are increasingly asking whether local infrastructure and natural resources can keep pace.

This program explores how data centers use water and electricity, the different cooling technologies they employ, and the potential impacts on groundwater, municipal water supplies, energy demand, rural landscapes, and quality of life. Experts will also discuss why hyperscalers in Chesterfield VA are not inevitable and the need for government to call for a moratorium. Participants will be invited to engage and take action. There will be calls to action and how citizens can engage their government officials and community members to balance economic development with environmental stewardship and community interests.

FOJG Advocacy Update by Lee Williams





July 11th rally protesting data center expansion. Photo courtesy of Lee Williams.

For years, elected officials in Virginia have treated data center expansion as an unquestioned economic boon, while Big Tech forced unregulated AI on users with no regard for our consent, intellectual property, workers, shared resources, environmental damage or basic democratic decision-making processes. Together, they have disrupted the fabric of our communities with their unwanted, secretive projects and hammered us endlessly with a false, forced narrative of inevitability.

Back in May, members of the Falls of the James Group joined the steering committee and began working in coalition with Central Virginia Data Center Defiance. We are a local, community-lead coalition fighting the rapid expansion of massive digital infrastructure, the subsequent gas-fired power plants proposed to fuel them, and specifically targeting major developments like Dominion's Cumberland Gas Plant and Google's multi-billion dollar data center in Chesterfield County. We have participated in board of supervisor meetings in both Chesterfield and Henrico and facilitated educational outreach to leadership in the City of Richmond.

On July 11 more than 200 people from across the commonwealth gathered at Richmond's Bell Tower in the Virginia State Capitol Square to tell state leaders "Enough Is Enough". Sierrans were among the coalition of environmental, consumer and justice organizations, and included speakers from communities directly affected by data center construction. Together we let state leaders know that rising electricity bills, pollution, and unchecked data center and fossil fuel infrastructure development have pushed Virginia communities too far. We have yet to see whether or not they have heard us.

To add your voice, contact our Advocacy Chair Lee Williams at lee.sierraclub.greennewdealva@gmail.com to take action or get more involved.

Data Center Defiance Group





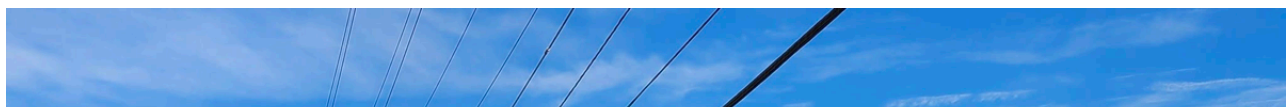
Image courtesy of Lisa Thompson.

Data Center Defiance is a recently formed group that is opposing the proliferation of data center campuses in our region. Currently, there are at least 16 proposed Google and Chirisa data centers in Chesterfield and a large number of Quality Technology Services (QTS) data centers being built in the Sandston area of Henrico County. These data centers were quietly approved by local boards that signed nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) with the companies.

The Data Center Defiance group is seeking a moratorium on building these projects until a transparent analysis can be done on the amounts of water and energy they will consume and the impacts on the environment. Meanwhile, the group is challenging air and water permits for these projects, organizing rallies and speakers at monthly Board meetings and educating area residents about the negative financial and environmental impacts of these hyperscale data centers.

For more information contact Lisa Thompson at lisacthompson@verizon.net

Sierra Club Opposes Dominion/NextEra Merger





Sierra Club members and Friends of Chesterfield County members protested the proposed NextEra Energy and Dominion merger on June 16th near the Hilton on West Broad in Richmond where the Virginia Energy Summit was being held. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

NextEra Energy and Dominion Energy, two of the nation's highest polluting utilities with record-high profits, have submitted applications to the Virginia State Corporation Commission, the South Carolina Public Service Commission, and the North Carolina Utilities Commission to merge into one single utility. The proposed merger fails public interest scrutiny and neglects the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) mandates.

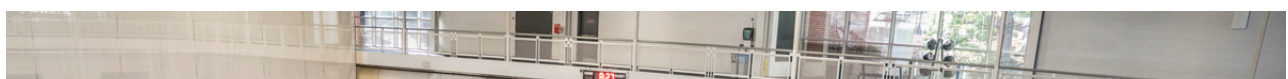
Citing the likelihood of more gas power plants to feed the energy needs of data centers and the rising electric bills that will result, Sierra Club has joined much of the Virginia environmental community in opposing this merger. Dominion is already determined to skirt the climate pollution limits in the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA), and more fossil fueled power plants would effectively gut the phase out of gas and coal plants by 2045 in the VCEA.

Another concern is the growth of a mega-monopoly utility, and the disproportionate influence it would have over the legislative process. Dominion is already the largest corporate donor to Virginia politics, and the merger would only further finance influence peddling and lobbying before the General Assembly.

We are calling on our members and friends to ask their state legislators to oppose the merger. You can take that action right [HERE](#).

Glen Besa, FOJG Executive Committee Member

The Big Yard Sale





The Saturday Big Yard Sale at the University of Richmond. Photo courtesy of Dave Parrish.





Top left photo shows volunteers unloading the Goodwill truck and moving student goods into the Weinstein Center in the rain. Photo courtesy of Bruce Tarr. Top right and bottom photos show shoppers at the Big Yard Sale. Photos courtesy of Dave Parrish.

The May 2026 Big Yard Sale happened in a new and delightful climate-controlled location: the basketball courts of the Weinstein Fitness Center at the University of Richmond. 89 volunteers helped set up the two-day sale, which saw a record number of 1,300 customers. Over twenty thousand dollars was brought in, to be split between Falls of the James Group and the University's Rethink Waste department.

In addition, before the Sale, items were donated to the SPCA of Richmond and local non-profits which help people in poverty or experiencing homelessness. Things which did not sell went to longtime partner Goodwill, which placed a tractor trailer on campus for a month to hold stuff pre-sale. Foam mattress pads were donated to a Richmond company which re-uses them.

Falls of the James Group uses its proceeds to provide stipends to speakers at monthly programs and to recipients of annual Green Giant Awards.

Last Fall, the Group also gave one thousand dollars each to ten local non-profits which run feeding programs, to non-corporate media, plant trees, and other worthy endeavors. Finally, I list the intrepid team who worked tirelessly for several months planning and executing the Big Yard Sale:

Lisa Thompson
 Joe Brancoli
 Shavon Peacock
 Margie Langston
 Linda Redmond
 Lydia Pittman
 Aileen Rivera
 Daryl Downing

Thank you all, for a real good time!

Joe Brancoli,
 Chair, Falls of the James Group.

"I got 40 red white & blue shoe strings
 and a thousand telephones that don't ring
 Do you know where I can get rid of these things?"
 Bob Dylan

June FOJG Potluck Picnic and Plant Swap



June 7th was the FOJG Annual Potluck Picnic and Plant Swap at the Carillon Shelter in Byrd Park. Around 35 members and volunteers at the Big Yard Sale celebrated another successful Big Yard Sale with delicious food and plant swapping. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

June FOJG Hike along Riverside Drive and the James River





Hikers along Riverside Drive. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

On June 13th, starting at the Pony Pasture Rapids Park, 10 of us hiked 2.5 miles one way, passing through the Huguenot Woods and the Huguenot Flatwater Park to the far western end of Riverside Drive. We then retraced our steps for a brisk 5 -mile hike in total. We saw osprey diving for fish at the Z Dam, passed old granite quarry ponds, saw evidence of beaver damage, and admired the beauty of the river with all its exposed rocks.

Shavon Peacock
FOJG Outings Leader

July 14th FOJG Summer Program - Why Are Insects Important?





Moe "Bugs" Martin talking about why insects are so important. Photo courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

Moe "Bugs" Martin gave an informative presentation on the importance of insects at our July 14th FOJG program at the Beet Cafe meeting room at Ellwood Thompson's grocery store. Please view her PowerPoint presentation [Here](#).

Join our Sierra Club FOJG Meetup Group and Get Notifications of Upcoming Hikes

[Sierra Club - Falls of the James Group | Meetup](#) We now have 862 Meetup members.

If you are willing to travel to northern VA and surrounding areas, the **Sierra Club Potomac Outings Group** has many outings each month. Check them out here [Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings \(SCPRO\) | Meetup](#)

Check out national and international Sierra Club Outings here [Search Trips](#)

You can check out other local free virtual and in-person events at:

FOJG Calendar [Events/Calendar | Sierra Club](#)
Virginia Chapter Sierra Club calendar here [Events Calendar | Sierra Club](#)

Check out more environmental events on our FOJG Facebook page thanks to FOJG member Daryl Downing's frequent sharing of environmental events! [\(4\) Sierra Club - Falls of the James | Facebook](#)

Join the Sierra Club

If you are not a member and are interested in joining the oldest, largest grassroots environmental organization in the country, you can join for as little as \$15 here. [Join Today. Become a champion. \(sierraclub.org\)](#) Once you join the national Sierra Club, you are automatically a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Falls of the James Group Sierra Club.

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