



Sierran

To Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet

Georgians Score Victories Against Dirty Energy

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Resolutions

By Colleen Kiernan

By the time this issue hits your mailbox, you may have already made some resolutions for 2011. If you have, I hope that one or more of them will help protect our planet...if you haven't, it's not too late.

There are really two different categories change falls into, personal behavior and policy change. As I consider my own resolutions, I am trying to pick at least one from each category.

Our office in Decatur is about 6 miles from my duplex in Ormewood Park. I have a very nice road bike, and I love riding it. A variety of excuses keep me from biking: it's too hot, it's too cold, I have a meeting in the middle of the day, I have to schlep stuff around, you get the idea. But more often than not, biking would be a fine way to commute. It takes about the same amount of time as driving, it gives me time to think, and it requires no fossil fuels. I am resolved to bike to work at least once a week in 2011, no more excuses.

In addition to improving your commuting, there are lots of other ways to implement personal change. Energy efficiency improvements can be easy and they save money. If you haven't outfitted your light fixtures with compact fluorescents, now is the time! The light quality has gotten much better over the last few years, plus you'll be prepared for the federally mandated phase-out of incandescents scheduled to begin in 2012.

Sealing the ducts in your home can be the biggest bang for the buck. I tackled that last year. My friend Sean and I opened the door to my crawlspace that December afternoon and were greeted by a wave of warm, heated air. We slapped on mastic where all the joints were, and my natural gas bill dropped 30 percent immediately, since I was no longer heating my crawlspace.

I finally figured out my programmable thermostat and so I no longer have to kick myself for forgetting to adjust the thermostat when I leave the house—I've outsmarted myself. Insulation is a big winner, too. Even if you have the pink batt insulation, you can still get great gains by blowing foam insulation on top of it. My next energy improvement is going to be solar hot water heating.

If you're done with your house, help a friend or neighbor take a look at theirs, or even tackle your workplace. Chances are there are improvements that can be made in all of those places, too. And your friends, neighbors and boss will thank you for it. You can also eat lower on the food chain, and try to eat local, organically produced food. It takes 8 or more pounds of grain to produce 1 pound of beef!

In terms of engagement in our political system, I have only lived in my state house district for a year, and that's about as



Colleen Kiernan, Chapter Director

long as my representative, Simone Bell, has been in office. I have yet to meet her, and am resolved to fix that and develop a relationship with her so she will know who to go to when she needs more information on environmental issues.

If you already know your State Senator and State Representative, contact me at colleen.kiernan@sierraclub.org to sign up for our Legislative Liaison program, where we will ask you to contact your elected officials at least three times this session.

If you have less experience in this area, resolve to respond to a certain number of our action alerts. We try to make it as easy as possible by telling you about the issue, who needs to be contacted, a draft of the comment and you can send it with a click of the button. If you still need to sign up, go to www.georgia.sierraclub.org/signup. Or maybe this is the year you go to your local Sierra Club Group meeting, or an issue committee meeting, or Sierra Club 101. Whatever you do, resolve to do a little more than you did last year. Our planet will thank you for it!

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2011 Legislature May Address Water Issues

By Neill Herring

With the July 2012 deadline for reaching agreement among Georgia and its downstream neighbors in Alabama and Florida regarding the water in Lake Lanier only a year and a half away, the Governor and the General Assembly ought to be motivated to find solutions to Metro Atlanta's water supply problems. Two legislative initiatives related to water supply seem likely in 2011.

One would be at least a gesture to the downstream states and to those Georgians who live downstream from Metro Atlanta: the regulation of the movement of water from one river basin to another. The other initiative is not as plain in its details yet, but represents a longer term, if problematic, alternative for Metro in its relations with its downstream neighbors: the impoundment of larger volumes of water in reservoirs.

The regulation of interbasin transfers of water has been an issue for over a decade. It has been the subject of several bills in previous sessions, although few have ever emerged from legislative committees. The Metro Chamber of Commerce, and less explicable, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce have determined that such legislation poses a grave threat to "the engine driving Georgia's economy:" the Metro Atlanta Growth Industry. That industry's lackluster performance since 2008 has perversely made ideological faith in its powers even greater than during the sprawl boom.

The Georgia Chamber supposedly represents the voices of business outside Metro. For many such communities, Metro's projected thirst, even if wildly overestimated, is seen as a real threat to their own economic futures. That the Chambers were enthusiastic in support for the Statewide Comprehensive Water Plan of 2009, which set forth a detailed description of the regulation of interbasin transfers, is now forgotten in the

rituals of Metro Growth Worship. The former Director of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Harold Reheis, is now a reservoir promoter, and says that imposition of the Water Plan's regulations would strangle Metro growth.

Reservoirs, new lakes to supplement or even replace the water from Lake Lanier on which Atlanta now depends for its water supply, are the legislative fad of this era. "We can capture the water that falls on Georgia and use it ourselves," runs the argument, as if the downstream interests that are already offended by the existing captures would not notice, or protest. But a more pertinent problem for these lake builders is how to pay for their projects. The fundamental legislative fact facing Georgia, and lot of other states, is a lack of funds. The projected deficit in the 2012 state budget is about \$2 billion.

Those legislators who represent Georgians who live downstream are being asked to: (1) trust the EPD to protect their future water supplies from the ambitions, not even the actual need, of Metro Atlanta, and (2) possibly to pay for projects that allow Atlanta to realize its ambitions of drying out their neighbors. With reapportionment looming this year, and a permanent shift of legislative influence into the Metro region, the stakes are high for those who live downstream.



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Transportation Funding Initiatives in 2011?

By Neill Herring

In 2010 the General Assembly passed House Bill 277, a complicated transportation funding bill. HB 277 sets up transportation funding districts around the state. It requires the cities and counties in each district to meet in roundtables to make lists of transportation projects they would build if they were able to collect a new one percent local option sales tax in the district. That list is then to be put before the voters of each district during the General Primary in the summer of 2012, when they will vote on whether or not to increase the sales tax in the district. Failure by a district to make a project list will reduce the amount of state road aid for any district that does not have a referendum.

No county in any district may receive more than 20 percent of the funds for the district. In the Metro Atlanta district no funds may be used to pay any existing costs of the MARTA system. Fulton and DeKalb Counties in Metro are already paying a one percent sales tax for MARTA. The voters in those two counties will be voting on adding another one percent transportation sales tax that could not be used to operate their existing public transportation system.

News reports on the initial formation of the district roundtables around the state have been generally pessimistic in the initial stages. Local officials complain that the districts in which they are located are not populous enough to generate sufficient levels of funding or that affordable local projects were unlikely to be popular enough to win voter support for their funding. A fear that one locality would be unfairly required to subsidize another seems common.

In Metro Atlanta, many local mayors have simply refused to support any referendum until some method is devised for organizing regional public transportation under a single um-

brella. A Joint Legislative Study Committee is looking at the regional public transportation issue. Whether that will produce a remedy that can win the mayors' support for the new funding referendum is not yet known, nor is there any legal deadline for such action.

Meanwhile, a Constitutional Amendment that would have allowed Georgia DOT to engage in more efficient multi-year contracts for transportation projects was rejected by the voters in November. This may have been a reaction to a pre-election decision of the State Road and Tollway Authority to indefinitely continue the tolls on GA 400, despite earlier promises to stop collections when the initial construction cost had been repaid.

The state's excise tax on motor fuel remains at 7.5 cents per gallon of fuel, while the sale price of motor fuel continues a steady rise. In the 1960s the sale price of gasoline was less than 50 cents per gallon, rendering the 7.5 cents per gallon a meaningful portion of fuel cost, but today's gas prices, often nearing \$3.00 per gallon, leave the 7.5 cents a small fraction of the sale price. If the excise tax were set as a percentage of the price of the fuel, like the sales tax, it could rise with that price, and transportation funding levels would be determined by the market value of the fuel to users. A change in the State Constitution to alter the calculation for the motor fuel excise tax could also allow the use of some of the funds collected for "all transportation purposes," not just the "public roads and bridges" that are permitted today.

Because the next statewide elections will not be held until 2012, it seems likely that any changes to the present transportation planning and funding plans will be delayed until the legislative session of 2012, although the discussion and deliberation may commence in 2011. There is often a need for a deadline before the legislature can bring itself to act.



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Mixed Results for Environment in 2010 Georgia Elections

By Mark Woodall

The election returns seem fairly positive for our work to make Metro Atlanta a world class city when it comes to mass transit.

Congratulations to Political Chair Eddie Ehlert and all the others who worked to elect Elena Parent to Georgia House District 81. Elena replaces Rep. Jill Chambers, who had long been among the most visible foes of MARTA and mass transit in the legislature.

The Chapter's RAIL (Regional Action to Improve Livability) campaign made many phone calls to Clayton County to urge the voters to support the MARTA non-binding referendum, which won big with over two-thirds of the vote in favor. So thanks and congratulations to the RAIL campaign.

It was also good to see that rail advocate State Senator Doug Stoner won re-election by a wide margin.

Georgia Amendment 4, which will allow multi-year energy efficiency contracts for state government, passed by a 60 percent to 40 percent margin, which is a step forward. In national energy campaign news, California voters defeated the Valero/Texas Big Oil attempt to roll back clean energy/global climate change legislation, Proposition 23, by a wide margin.

Unfortunately, our Cobb County state legislator friend, State Rep. Pat Dooley, lost, as did our excellent freshman legislator from Gwinnett, Rep. Lee Thompson.

Thanks to all of you who worked on any campaign or participated in the phone bank to remind our members to vote, as well as all who voted.

Three New Members Join Chapter ExCom

The Georgia Chapter welcomes three new member to the Chapter Executive Committee following elections last fall:

Todd Daniel of Powder Springs has been a Sierra Club volunteer for many years, serving at the local level as past chair and newsletter editor of the Centennial Group and at the state level as past vice chair and newsletter editor. Currently, he is on his second stint as chapter secretary and is also the population Issue leader, and is a corresponding member on the national population committee.

Kelly Jordan of Atlanta began his environmental career in 1976 as a committee chair on Mayor Maynard Jackson's Committee for the Great Park. He has also served as a Trustee of The Big Trees Nature Preserve in Sandy Springs, is founding Chair of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, and has served on the boards of The Georgia Conservancy, Historic Oakland Cemetery, Historic 4th Ward Conservancy, Park Pride, Wonderland Gardens, and the Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort. He is a 2006 graduate of the Institute for Georgia Environmental Leadership program (IGEL).

Michael Walls of Atlanta has been a member of the Club for ten-plus years and served for several years as Litigation Chair. For the last seven years he has been intensely involved in local and regional transit, land-use and air quality issues as a member of the MARTA Board, serving for four of those years as Board Chairman.

The Chapter would also like to recognize **Bettye Harris, Judy Jennings**, and **Rand Knight**, whose tenures on ExCom concluded in December. Thank you for your dedicated service!

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Court Rejects Key Permit for Plant Washington

A Georgia state court rejected Georgia's air quality permit for Plant Washington, a proposed 850 mega-watt coal-fired power plant in Sandersville, GA. According to the December 16 ruling, the state permit for the Plant Washington violated Clean Air Act safeguards to limit harmful air pollution.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division must reconsider its permit after the court found it failed to set safe limits on harmful emissions from the plant, including dozens of hazardous air pollutants that can cause cancer, birth defects, heart disease, developmental disorders, and other serious injuries.

Plant Washington is a project of Power4Georgians, a company organized by Cobb Electric Membership Corporation (EMC) and four other EMCs. GreenLaw and the Southern Environmental Law Center challenged the state air quality permit in court on behalf of the Fall-line Alliance for a Clean Environment, Ogeechee Riverkeeper, Sierra Club's Georgia Chapter, and Southern Alliance for Clean Energy.

"Throughout this case, the State took the untenable position that the Clean Air Act does not apply in Georgia," said Kurt Eb-

ersbach, a senior attorney with GreenLaw. "This decision affirms that it does apply and that EPD failed to follow its dictates in setting appropriate limits for the many hazardous air pollutants that this proposed coal plant would emit in large quantities."

"This is a huge victory for the residents of Washington County and surrounding areas who have long been concerned that limits set by EPD were not adequate to protect public health," said Katherine Helms Cummings, director of the Fall-line Alliance for a Clean Environment. "We appreciate Judge Walker's careful consideration of the evidence and testimony and her adherence to what the law requires."

"This decision further highlights that the push for this plant by Cobb EMC, which already charges members some of the highest energy rates in the state, is a looming financial pitfall," said Colleen Kiernan, Director of the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club. "Co-ops can meet their energy needs with cost-effective energy efficiency and we look forward to working with them on bringing this inexpensive energy to members."

Elbert County Incinerator Flames Out

By Larry Winslett, Waste/Recycling Issue Leader

The citizens of Elbert and surrounding counties in North Georgia can now breathe a little easier because it appears that a proposed waste-to-energy incinerator there is dead. GreenFirst, a permitting front group, has announced that it is no longer considering the construction of the approx. 1600 ton-per-day incinerator. The plan collapsed when Covanta Energy (one of the world's most notorious polluters) decided to pass on the opportunity to own and operate the plant. They cited "economic concerns" as the reason. But public opposition was intense and well organized.

The Sierra Club got involved very early on after hearing of the plan. Having the experience of past incinerator fights, the club was able to make sure locals had the information and contacts they needed to fight the plan. A strong and well organized local group, Citizens for Public Awareness (CPA) was formed and led a large opposition in Elbert and surrounding areas. The Sierra Club and other groups continued to provide support and oppose the plan. Several lawsuits also got into the mix.

Another factor was that the facility was planned to also burn wood, or "biomass." This was the basis for trying to pass this off as a "green" facility. At least a third of the daily burn was to be wood, where was it going to come from? The fact that they figured out they would have to actually buy the wood is probably the "economic concern" that was a problem. In addition, it is suspected that GreenFirst wanted economic stimulus money as well to help fund the multi-million dollar project and that also did not materialize.

Whatever the reasons we are thankful that this project ap-

pears to be dead and grateful to all those who worked so hard to fight it. But we must stay on alert for these things. Like many bad ideas they never go away they just get reinvented or relocated. For example, there is still an incinerator proposal under consideration in Toombs County.

The evidence of the dangers of all forms of waste incinerators is overwhelming. Today, incinerators are being floated as "new" or "green" technologies. They have been given fancy names like biomass, waste-to-energy, pyrolysis, plasma arc, or gasification plants. Don't be fooled. The fact is that they are the same old dangerous polluters as always. If it burns garbage, it's an incinerator.

The companies promoting them use environmental- or patriotic-sounding names like "GreenFirst" or "Freedom Energy Recovery." Their incinerators are neither "green" or "free." Their pitch is "zero waste" and "zero cost." Sound too good to be true? It is. Despite the claims that the new ones are totally contained and "clean," incinerators cannot defy basic physics. Matter can't be destroyed—mercury in, mercury out. ALL incinerators pollute the air, land, and water. Their by-products have been shown to cause cancer, asthma, and birth defects. They discourage recycling and waste reduction. Incinerators always destroy property values.

The trend worldwide is to shut down, and, in many countries and states, ban incinerators. So the rest of Georgia needs to be on the watch for these new proposals. Georgia is currently lucky because we have no Solid Waste (household garbage) incinerators in the state. We need to keep it that way. Georgia legislators need to ban solid waste incineration once and for all.

Let's Invest in Innovation

By Stacey Kronquest

The great thing about science is that it doesn't lie. If something can be proven, tested and verified then it should be difficult for a rational person to ignore the science, right?

Not really. Unless our immediate safety is at stake, science usually takes a backseat to our daily agenda. Putting aside what that might say about the shortsightedness, and future prospects, of our species, it explains why we didn't really care what happened in Cancun in December.

Don't worry, you're not missing the Miss Universe Pageant.

It's the United Nations talk on climate change. I know, not that old issue again.

I'm going to spare you the spiel on planetary threats of rising global temperatures, the collapse of polar ice sheets and glaciers that provide water for over a billion people, and the acidification of the oceans that destroys the base of the food chain. That doesn't seem to motivate any of us.

Instead let's talk about what really motivates us. Money. If the United States had a middle name, it would be innovation. Or money.

We invented the car, the airplane the telephone—the basis for contemporary transportation and communication. Yet it is as if we have been drugged into thinking that the only way to fuel our economy is on last century's technology. That's not innovation. We are losing our edge. We are losing part of who we are as a nation.

We are losing money.

I'm not going to go into all that stuff about the energy industry paying our representatives in government to protect their economic interests. That would be too negative and likely offend several of our local federal representatives like Jack Kingston and John Barrow, and I don't want to do that. Though I must mention that Kingston signed a pledge not to put a price on carbon emissions.

Which brings us to the crux of the issue. The energy issue.

If taxpayers stopped subsidizing fossil fuels (thank you Dick Cheney and the 2005 energy bill) and instead put that money into research and development of

alternative large-scale energy projects, as well as renovating the energy grid, it is estimated that the economy would grow, and, most importantly, add jobs. According to a 2009 study by Pew, jobs in a clean energy economy grew at a national rate of 9.1 percent, while traditional jobs grew only 3.1 percent.

But how do we make this happen? Here's what one Republican, Congressman Bob Inglis of South Carolina, has suggested: A revenue-neutral tax swap, where payroll taxes are cut while a tax is levied on carbon. The carbon tax increases gradually, but the mere prospect that fossil fuels will become more expensive than clean energy will unleash investment in carbon-free sources like solar and wind.

Cutting the payroll tax, meanwhile, puts money into consumers' pockets and lets employers hire more workers, thereby providing a sorely needed boost to our ailing economy.

This is just one idea. We need others. We need a vigorous discussion on Capital Hill. We need a new energy policy. But we won't get that if we—as in *The People*—don't tell our guys in Washington what we want them to do. A John Barrow aid recently told me that John does only what his constituents want. While we know that that isn't quite true (exactly how much money did Barrow take from the oil and gas industry last year?), we should take him at his word.

I'll never forget when the Catholic Pastoral Parish in Savannah invited me to come and talk to them about recycling and handed me a brochure on global warming. They viewed it as a moral imperative to speak up and to educate people about the planet's precarious state.

They had all the charts and quotes from the National Academies of Science and felt in their hearts that they must act, but they didn't know what to do. I would tell them the same thing today I told them five years ago—write to your federal representative and ask each of your parishioners to do the same.

Not only must we have faith in science, we must have faith in ourselves to act. To innovate.

Southern Georgians Beating Back Bad Development, Seeking Help

By James Remus

Hundreds of mainland and island residents are joining together to protect Brunswick, the Golden Isles and Glynn County from environmental damage.

More than 700 people have signed petitions through preservessi.com and dozens of residents have attended meetings to oppose a proposed shopping center that would damage nearby marshes, enable pollution of waterways, destroy multiple trees, pave over acres of virgin land, invite thousands of cars and delivery trucks, and reroute a bicycle/pedestrian path.

The project, known as the Red Barn Development, has made headlines throughout Glynn County and Southern Georgia because—in addition to the problems mentioned above—the development violates the county's comprehensive plan approved only two years ago.

Many residents who do not live near the project site are concerned about the ramifications of violating that plan, feeling that this major change could lead to unhindered development throughout the county and on the islands.

The specific site is on St. Simons Island a mile north of any other retail center and several miles from the island's population center. The island does have other vacant land designated for future commercial use, but the developer is focused on this site at the corner of South Harrington Drive and Frederica Road.

Leaders of the opposition group are still seeking petition signatures from residents of Georgia and encouraging opponents to show up at the February 17th Glynn Board of Commissioners meeting.

**take
action**

Visit preservessi.com to sign the petition and for more information on how to get involved.

Looking for Glaciers

By Steve Willis

In the summer of 2005 I left Bogue Island, N.C., after spending a beach week with my family, and set out on a six week pilgrimage to Glacier National Park, Montana. My old, red 1993 Mercedes 190 rolled through the seemingly endless drive, almost 3,000 miles each way, in 100 degree plus temperatures – although it was continuously on the verge of overheating. After a week of touring the park, I set up a more permanent camp in a Sioux-style tee-pee on the grounds of the International Hostel in the microscopic village of Polebridge, on the North Fork of the Flathead River, which marks the western edge of Glacier Park. Isolated Polebridge is 37 miles of rocky, washboard dirt road away from the nearest paved highway.

The main destination of my trip was to view the massive glaciers of Glacier Park while they still existed. I was too late.

Although I trekked far and wide, the closest thing I could find to a glacier was a huge block of ice floating in a frigid mountain pond. I once hiked up and down Khumbu Glacier in Nepal, and know what a real glacier looks like. Glacier Park had a few snowfields which still survive the summers, but nothing like the huge rivers of ice which can grind and bull-doze mountains down into valleys—glaciers.

One thing that caught my attention was that everywhere I looked I could see Park personnel taking down or putting up large informational billboards. I asked a ranger what was going

on, and he told me the following troubling story:

During the Clinton administration it had become apparent that the glaciers were rapidly receding. Large billboards were produced which explained the effect of increasing atmospheric carbon, climate change, and the effects of global warming—glacial melting. After the U.S. Supreme Court ruling against Al Gore in 2000, the George W. Bush administration adopted the policy that climate change was probably cyclic, and, even if global warming was occurring, it might not be related to human activity. So, down came the Clinton era signs and up went the gospel according to Bush. Well, subsequently the Bush administration was forced to concede that there was, indeed, global warming, and human activity was affecting it. This was the scene in the Kabuki Theater play being acted out when I walked in, the Bush signs were being taken down and the old Clinton signs being put back up. Strange.

Stranger still is the fact that while we have just experienced the hottest six months, and the hottest year, and the hottest decade ever recorded, the concern in America over global warming continues to diminish. Sea level is rising, the ice caps melting, temperatures threaten to soar exponentially as the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere increases, as predicted—weather patterns have become evermore unpredictable, and all in just a few decades. Due to the acidifying effect of more CO₂ being absorbed into the oceans, marine scientists tell us the biomass (that is, the living things) in the oceans has declined over 40% in the past fifty years, and is threatened with even more catastrophic declines if present trends continue. Species are going extinct at a rate earth hasn't experienced for 40 million years, and the list of challenges to our future goes on and on...

One of my political and environmental inspirations, James Mackay, who served six terms in the Georgia legislature and one in the U.S. Congress, frequently repeated a quote from the influential political scientist John Whitehouse, "We are ruled by men who, if the stars should fall, would only laugh." Well, the stars are falling, and the men who control our political and economic sectors are mostly only laughing, chortling, scoffing at anyone who voices concern for the future of our planet. Appalling.

Our leaders have for the most part come to resemble wolves picking off sheep from the flock rather than shepherds leading their constituents away from danger and towards greener pastures. Well, what do sheep expect? A thoughtful, well-informed citizenry is essential to a healthy democracy, (as they used to say in civics class, when we still had civics classes). To paraphrase Clint Eastwood in *The Unforgiven*, it is time we informed ourselves. We must inform ourselves, and act on the facts, not what we would like facts to be. Reality is not a consumer choice. Can we continue to huff that everything is someone else's responsibility, someone else's fault? The way things are going, it won't just be our grandchildren who will be suffering for our sins, and it won't be just the glaciers which will be missing from the earth. Most of us will have box seats.



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Opossums Make Good Neighbors

By **Melanie Furr**, *AWARE Volunteer*

One morning recently, AWARE (Atlanta Wild Animal Rescue Effort) received a call from a man complaining about an opossum trapped in his garbage can. He demanded that someone from our center come and remove it. The volunteer who answered the call explained to the caller that opossums are not dangerous and described an easy way to free the animal by simply turning the garbage can over and tilting the bottom up. Nevertheless, the caller insisted that the animal was a threat to his small dogs and wanted AWARE to relocate the animal. Again the volunteer reassured him that opossums are harmless and tried to explain the futility of trapping and relocating them. At this point, the man became somewhat belligerent and threatened to kill the opossum if we did not send someone to his house immediately. As a volunteer-based organization that stays busy all the time, AWARE typically does not make house calls for animals trapped in garbage cans. Because an animal's life was at stake, however, one of the volunteers made the 30-mile drive to the man's house to rescue the opossum, which turned out to be a juvenile, not much larger than a squirrel. Unfortunately, this man's reaction was not that uncom-



mon. Wildlife rehabilitators find that the opossum is one of the most misunderstood animals in North America. What is it about the opossum that makes this unique, beneficial animal so unpopular and unwelcome in our neighborhoods? When people come to understand them better, they find that opossums actually make great neighbors.

Some people believe opossums are rodents, but they are actually marsupials—animals that carry their young in a pouch like kangaroos and koala bears. In fact, the Virginia opossum has the distinction of being North America's only marsupial and has been around since the age of the dinosaurs. Opossum infants are so small that a typical litter of 8 to 9 young can fit into a teaspoon. After a brief gestation period, the tiny infants use a motion similar to swimming to make the long, difficult journey from the birth canal into the mother's pouch, where they latch onto a teat and remain for about two months. When the babies become too large to fit into the mother's pouch, they climb out and are carried on the mother's back. At this time, they learn how to find food and avoid predators. At approximately 3 months of age, the babies are weaned, and by about 4 months of age, they are ready to be on their own. Opossums are solitary creatures and typically come together solely to mate. Their average life span in the wild is only 1 to 2 years, due partly to a more rapid aging process than other mammals and partly to the presence of predators, including dogs, people, and cars.

Another common misconception about opossums is that they are vicious and rabid. Actually, opossums are exceptionally non-aggressive and shy. In the presence of a threat, they will flee if possible. If unable to escape, an opossum has a number of interesting defense mechanisms. The first thing an opos-



sum will do if it feels threatened is to hiss and bare its 50 teeth (more than any other North American mammal). Although this behavior looks fierce, it is mostly a bluff since opossums generally only bite in self defense. In addition to showing its teeth, an opossum that feels threatened may wobble and begin to drool excessively, tactics which may be mistaken as signs of rabies. In actuality, these behaviors are intended to make potential predators believe that the animal is sick, and therefore, unappetizing. When these defenses fail, the opossum will "play 'possum," slipping into an involuntary comatose state resulting from fear. This death-like state can last from just a few minutes up to a few hours. Since the kill is part of a predator's stimulus to eat, an apparently dead opossum does nothing to excite the predator's appetite, and the predator will often walk away. Mysteriously, the opossum knows when the danger has passed and revives. In addition to being non-threatening animals, opossums are one of the least likely mammals in North America to carry rabies. The reason for this may have something to do with the fact that opossums have a lower body temperature than many other



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mammals, making it difficult for the rabies virus to survive in their bodies. In fact, the occurrence of rabies in opossums is so rare that a cow is more likely to carry rabies than an opossum!

Now that we have exposed a number of misconceptions about opossums, what are some of the benefits that these exceptional animals provide to the areas in which they live? Opossums help maintain a clean and healthy environment. Their diet consists of all types of insects, snails, and slugs, keeping our gardens free of pests. They catch and eat mice and rats, keeping rodent populations in check. Opossums are also immune to the venom of poisonous snakes and thus will feed on snakes such as copperheads. Additionally, they consume rotting fruit and carrion, thus sanitizing the ecosystem. Opossums are certainly worthy of their title as "nature's sanitation engineers." Without them, harmful pest and rodent populations would proliferate in our neighborhoods. Furthermore, other animals such as raccoons and skunks (animals that are more susceptible to diseases and potentially more destructive) would fill the niche left in the ecosystem by the absence of the opossum. Typically, opossums quietly go about doing their job at night, so unless you are out taking a late-night stroll, you are unlikely to encounter them. They don't burrow, dig, or destroy property, so most people never even realize that an opossum has been in their yard. In short, opossums make wonderful neighbors!

For these reasons, AWARE takes great measures to rehabilitate injured or orphaned opossums and to educate the public about these important creatures. In 2010, we rescued more than 250 opossums. If you find an injured or orphaned opossum, call AWARE at 678-418-1111 or visit our website, www.awareone.org, for a list of rehabilitators in your area. In addition to the AWARE website, www.opposum.org and www.opposumsocietyus.org are good sources of information on opossums. These websites can also tell you how to humanely keep opossums away from your property, although we don't see why you'd want to!

Who Killed Granmaw Gordon?

By D. Gordon Draves

As I walked DeKalb Avenue from the East Lake MARTA Station, I heard the distressing roar in the distance—the *whirr* of the chipper. Even while several blocks from Gordon Avenue, I knew that the protests had failed to save Granmaw Gordon and 100 other trees that shared the half-acre. What a bummer!

It was 2 PM on Saturday, October 30, but the carnage had been going on since 9:30 AM. The DeKalb Tree Service crew moved from tree to tree, cutting them down, hauling branches to the chipper and logs to a pile. Trees with red X's fell, but among the dead were trees not marked with an X, and according to the building plan were supposed to be saved. Teri Stewart (point person for the community group) pointed out that fact, and was told that from the beginning they all were to be cut—the building plan was a ruse.

This chapter of the story to save Granmaw started on Monday October 25, when Teri received the final decision of the Superior Court. The case had been dismissed on a technicality—the writ had been given to the wrong city employee. The Gordon Greenspace group had 30 days to appeal. However, only four days later, October 29, Atlanta issued a permit to the owner, Adam Gaslowitz, who had resisted attempts to modify his plan. It was filed late on a Friday, so the community had little time to react, with no opportunity to file a legal protest. Even though there is an ideal called "Atlanta Tree Ordinance," the old adage, "if there is a will, there is a way," came to mind. Later, Gaslowitz told the media that there was no appeal filed when he applied for the permit.

The crew worked quickly to cut most of the trees in the lot. By 4 PM, they had finished for the day, including grinding Granmaw to the ground with a huge rotary tub rasp.

Even though the parcel had several

things going for it, that was not enough to get it designated as a park. It had history: it was the last half acre of the 86.5 acre Sutherland Estate owned by Georgia Governor, US Senator, and General John Brown Gordon and his wife Fannie. It had wildlife protected by state, federal and international laws—but the police just stood by. Red-tailed hawks had a nest in one of the trees. Opossums and raccoons had dens in tree hollows and rabbits had burrows in the woods. Then there was 130-year old Granmaw Gordon herself with an apparent resistance to pecan scab, so cloning could have produced an asset that could save growers millions of dollars a year.

Lessons learned: if an owner wants to cut trees, there are some legal hurdles that can be placed in the way—but given any opportunity the person may act legally or illegally. Though the building plan had shown certain trees would be saved, many fell. So even with tree ordinances and planning requirements in

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ATLANTA GROUP DIRECTORY

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*Programs	Jeanne McCarthy, 404-873-3985 cell 678-595-4882 jeanne_mccarthy@bellsouth.net
*Political	Eddie Ehler, 770-455-4849 edeherl@bellsouth.net
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Outings	Martin McConaughay, mmcconoughay08@gmail.com
Membership	Lissa Jackson
* Denotes a member of the Metro Atlanta Group Executive Committee.	

Rivers Alive Cleanup



Atlanta Group members pose with their treasures from Peachtree Creek. Photo by Martin McConaughay.

By Nancy Wylie

On November 13 the Metro Atlanta Group did its first Rivers Alive river cleanup in recent history. We did the cleanup in the South Fork of Peachtree Creek in Medlock Park, the same area where we do both chemical monitoring and biologic monitoring throughout the year.

Some of us expected to pull things that would qualify as “litter” from the creek: cans, bottles, cups, etc, and expected that to be slight since there had

been high water recently that would remove that kind of thing. What actually was in the creek was stuff that people “dumped”. We removed six tires ranging in size from car through truck tires. There was a plastic chair that may have been washed from someone’s yard in a storm. Untold pounds of metal formwork and a huge light from the ball park were further evidence that some people would rather dump stuff in the creek than put it in the trash. There were also maybe 10 bags of the expected “litter” or “trash”.

Granmaw Gordon, continued from previous page

place, developers can act very irresponsibly with their property. For instance, the home next to the plot will have no shade next summer. The neighborhood is experiencing more noise, dust and pollutants. The grove of trees protected the neighbors, and made the area more interesting and fitting for the community.

What is really galling is the “thank you” from the developers—the court action delayed their building 10 condos and a possible bankruptcy, and there are no plans to build anything on the property. The clear-cut may have cleared out a blockage to development, or for selling

it to someone else. So for any groups wanting to save trees or block developments, get an injunction or other legal barrier to such actions.

More from Teri: Transcripts from Superior Court were ordered in July and our Park Pride account paid \$264.60 (check cashed in August) for the transcripts. Despite phone calls, letters, and E-mails to the transcriptionist, these essential documents have been intentionally withheld, as they are a requirement for filing an injunction and an appeal in the Court of Appeals. An open records request under the Freedom of Information Act was filed November 15.

For more information about this effort, future plans, and other articles, go to www.granmawgordon.com.

Upcoming Meetings & Programs

We meet the 2nd Tuesday of each month. Doors open at 7:00 p.m., program begins at 7:30. Church of the Epiphany, 2089 Ponce de Leon Ave.

Jan. 11: Georgia Water Coalition

Can you transfer water from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean just by taking a shower? There is a looming court decision that could affect water availability throughout the metro Atlanta area as a result of Georgia’s fight with neighboring Alabama and Florida. April Ingle will tell us about the Water Coalition’s concern about water use in Georgia, what the Coalition is supporting in the legislature. April is the Director of the Georgia River Network so you can also ask her about Paddle Georgia.

February 8: Legislative Update

Sierra Club lobbyist Neill Herring and Legislative Chair Mark Woodall will give the General Assembly update. In their annual report to the Atlanta Group members, Mark and Neill will detail the status of environmental bills in the legislature: who are the power players that will have an impact and what are the prospects for the bills we support. They will also recommend actions that each member can take. Big issues in this year’s legislature promise to be transportation—especially mass transportation, and water related issues. One of the major concerns is the transfer of water from one river basin to another.

Meeting Location: Metro Atlanta Group General membership meetings are held at the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, 2089 Ponce de Leon Ave. at the intersection of with East Lake Drive; the entrance to the church is off of East Lake Drive. From MARTA’s East Lake station, it’s a 15 minute walk north along East Lake Dr.

Centennial Holiday Party!

After a year of hard work, environmental activism, and informative monthly meetings, the end of the year brought the opportunity for the Centennial Group to reward themselves with a well-deserved Holiday party.



The Avery Gallery on Roswell Street in Marietta was the site for this year's gathering. The surrounding artwork, including paintings, photography, sculptures, and woodworking pieces, helped to create an elegant and classy ambience for the nearly 40 members who attended. Browsing the artwork was certainly a more interesting appetizer than chips and salsa.

Of course, one of the best parts of any holiday party is the food. Many of the members brought a covered dish to share, while others brought dessert. Judging by the (lack of) leftovers, this is a tradition that is still going strong, with good reason.

Following the meal, ExCom member Ashley Robbins took center stage to facilitate the annual fund-raising auction. Members were encouraged to donate items for the auction, and the goodies included several bird prints donated by our host for the evening, the Avery Gallery, an original oil painting by member Jane Springfield, a jug of maple syrup "im-

ported" from Ohio, and a vintage Stag knife from Germany. In short, there was something for everyone.

With that in mind, Ashley made it clear that no one was leaving the auction without buying something. After much discussion and cajoling, and not a little humor, she evidently accomplished this, as no one seemed to leave empty-handed. The auction itself generated record revenue, though hardly surprising, considering the quality of products auctioned off.

Thanks to all who helped make this year's Holiday get-together a winner!

Sierra Club License Plates

Centennial Group has the Sierra Club front auto plates now for sale. They identify you as a committed environmental activist, they serve as effective advertising for the club, they make a nice, thoughtful gift to friends who care about the cause, and not least, help sustain your Centennial Group. Your Centennial Group ExCom appreciates your support.



Plates can be purchased in two ways: 1) purchase at our monthly meetings for \$12.50 each; or, 2) purchase by mail for \$16.50 each, including postage and handling.

Make check out to Centennial Group and mail together with your order to: Wolfgang Tiedtke, 750 Bayliss Dr., Marietta, GA 30068.

Greater Gwinnett Group

By Dan Friedman

As I write this article Thanksgiving is behind us, literally and figuratively as I can see the damaging results of umpteen (is that a word?) thousand calories ingested over the weekend. Christmas is just ahead and in the holiday spirit, I look back over the past year and am very thankful for all the Gwinnett Group has accomplished. In poor economic times we have increased our membership due in no small part to timely programs, environmental activities, outreach, and, to paraphrase Jerry Lee Lewis, a whole lotta fun going on throughout the year. In the spring, our outreach to Chattahoochee Elementary School included planting trees and giving plants for the first graders to take home.

During the summer and throughout the year, our Stream Monitoring program continued with the help of Lynn and Michael Beach and Michael Hallen, among many others who weathered heat and cold to monitor Suwanee Creek. Our summer picnic was loads of fun. (Squirrels and rabbits and owls,

oh my!) Our political work helped many candidates, but alas, not all were victorious.

Our meetings were timely, with presentations by Ted Jackson from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, who talked about the Gulf oil disaster; Frank Stephens, who talked about what the tri-state water wars mean for Gwinnett County; and planners from the transportation consulting group Arcadis, who discussed what the options are for I-285 and what it means for Gwinnett County. In December we celebrated the end of the year with our annual holiday party at Art Sheldon's home. All had a great time and left stuffed and a few pounds heavier. Sierrans certainly do know how to eat and enjoy themselves.

January begins with Colleen Keirnan, Georgia Executive Director, presenting a state of the Chapter and what the Chapter will be doing in 2011—can you believe it is here already?—no one should miss this. Death is not an excuse. I hope your holidays were joyous, all your families are well and peace and good cheer to all.

Savannah River Group

By Judy Gordon

We continued to look at environmental problems around the world during our monthly meetings. In November, Dr. Cathy Tugmon, Augusta State University, used a delightful Powerpoint to show us the fauna of The Galapagos Islands and some of the ecological problems with which they are dealing. Cathy visited the islands this summer on a National Geographic trip.

Like most Georgia Sierra groups, we held ExCom elections in November. We elected officers at the November ExCom meeting, where we celebrated

some of our newer recruits with a pizza party (see photo). Celebrating continued into December with our annual Christmas Drop-in at Sam and Laurie Booher's. Armies are said to run on their stomachs, but Sierrans may not be far behind!

On a more serious note, we plan to focus on recycling and energy conservation in our monthly programs in 2011. January's monthly meeting will look at local recycling programs and feature a short DVD on recycling electronics.

Weather permitting, we will be visiting some local preserves to see rare spring plants in March. To learn more,

visit our web site in January when the pace picks up at georgia.sierraclub.org/srg.



L-R, back row: April Wilson, Greg Sutherland
Front row: Fred Hoogland, Rich McCrary

Support Your Chapter

Yes! I want to support the work of the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club for sustainable living, a healthy environment, improved transportation and a green Georgia future!

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- ☐ Please send more info on how to give an environmental bequest!

Make check payable to Georgia Chapter Sierra Club

Contributions and gifts to the Georgia Chapter of the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. For information concerning tax-deductible contributions to the Sierra Club Foundation to support grants for public education, research, and litigation programs necessary to further the Sierra Club's conservation goals, please contact colleen.kiernan@sierraclub.org or 404-607-1262 ext. 224.

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Visit the Georgia Chapter donation webpage at
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Contacts

Executive Committee

Chair: Mark Woodall, 706-674-2242,
markwoodall@windstream.net
At-Large Elected Member

Vice Chair - Administrative: Ashley Robbins,
276-780-3748, ashley.robbs@georgia.sierraclub.org,
Centennial Group Delegate

Vice Chair - Policy: Steve Willis, 912-341-0718
snwillis@yahoo.com
Coastal Group Delegate

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Savannah River Group Delegate

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Stacey Kronquest, 912-691-0769,
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LaGrange Group Delegate

J. Michael Walls, 404-643-5283,
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At-Large Elected Member

Appointed Officers & Chairs

Secretary: *vacant*

Treasurer: Tom Neff, tsneff2003@yahoo.com

Assistant Treasurer: Jennifer Leach,
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Conservation Chair: Alan Toney,
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Conservation Vice Chair: Sam Booher,
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Conservation Vice Chair: Larry Winslett,
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Finance Chair: Sam Booher, sbooher@aol.com

Fundraising Chair: Erin McPhail Wetty,
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Inner City Outings: Allison Williams,
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Legislative: Mark Woodall,
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Litigation: Mary Drake, mdrake126@charter.net

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Sierra Student Coordinator: Kelsea Norris,
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Training Team Coordinator: Terry Jones,
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Webmaster: Charlotte Gardner,
ga_sierra_webmaster@yahoo.com

Conservation Campaigns

RAIL Committee:

Jim Dexter, jimdex@aol.com
Meeting: 4th Mon., 6:45 p.m., chapter office

Smart Energy Solutions:

Colleen Kiernan, colleenkiernan@mindspring.com
Meeting: 1st Monday, 7 p.m. chapter office

Cool Cities: *vacant*

Wildlands and Wildlife:

Phil Zinsmeister, pzinsmeister@oglethorpe.edu
Meeting: 3rd Tues., 7:00 p.m., Location TBA
Committee sometimes skip months. E-mail first.

Volunteer Issue Leaders

The Conservation Committee is organized by issues. To get involved in Conservation issues, please contact the Issue Leader of your choice below.

Chattahoochee National Recreation Area:
Alan Toney, mudflat@comcast.com

Clean Air: Curt Smith, chsmith@speakeasy.net

Coastal: Judy Jennings,
judyjennings@comcast.net

Coastal Marsh: Mark Mosely, msmosely@aol.com

Cumberland: Annette Gelbrich,
apgelbrich@yahoo.com

Factory Farms: Thomas Black,
tblack9@yahoo.com

Federal Endangered Species: Larry Winslett,
winfog@windstream.net

Federal Public Lands: Shirl Parsons,
kparsons@mindspring.com

Historic Places/ Arch. Sites: Brian Thomas,
bthomas@trcsolutions.com

Marine Species/Habitat: Karen Grainey,
karengrainey@bellsouth.net

National Forest Issues: *vacant*

Nuclear Waste: Stacey Kronquest,
stacey@kronquest.com

Okefenokee Swamp: Sam Collier,
scollier@mindspring.com

Organic and Locally Grown Foods: Bryan Hager,
bhager@mindspring.com

Population: Todd Daniel, todddan@mac.com

Rivers and Wetlands: Keith Parsons,
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Savannah Harbor: Judy Jennings,
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State Lands/Georgia DNR: Phil Zinsmeister,
pzinsmeister@oglethorpe.edu

State Lands/Stone Mountain: Larry Winslett,
winfog@windstream.net

Stop I-3: Sam Booher, sbooher@aol.com

Transportation: Bryan Hager,
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Waste/Recycling: Larry Winslett,
winfog@windstream.net

Water Sentinels / Adopt-a-Stream:
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genie.strickland@sierraclub.org

National Staff

Regional Conservation Recruiter:

Erin Glynn, 404-607-1262 x.223
erin.glynn@sierraclub.org

Standing Meetings

Inner City Outings

Meetings: 4th Tuesday, 7 p.m., Chapter Office

Fundraising Committee

Third Wednesday of the month. Contact Erin Wetty
at ewetty@seyfarth.com for more info

Local Groups

A great way to get involved in your Chapter is by joining and participating in a local group. Some groups take certain months off, so it's a good idea to email first. Each group has a website. For maps and additional information on each group, visit the website: <http://georgia.sierraclub.org/local/>

Centennial Group

Serving Cobb, Cherokee & North Fulton

Chair: Wolfgang Tiedtke,
gacentexcom@gmail.com

Conservation Chair: Joe Sutherland,
suth1e@comcast.net

Outings Chair: Bob Springfield,
bob@bobspringfield.com

Meetings: 1st Thursday, welcome/refreshments 7:00 p.m., program 7:30 p.m.; Life College, 1269 Barclay Cir. SE, Marietta. For directions call Wolfgang Tiedtke at 770-973-7820.

Coastal Group

Serving Savannah & surrounding counties

Chair: Steve Willis, snwillis@yahoo.com

Conservation Chair: Judy Jennings,
judyjennings@comcast.net

Outings Chair: Steve Wagner,
sjwgnr@hotmail.com

Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 7:00 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 520 E. Washington Ave, Savannah

Greater Gwinnett Group

Serving Gwinnett Co.

Chair: Tom Morrissey, thmorrissey@bellsouth.net

Conservation Chair: Art Sheldon,
a.sheldon@charter.net

Outings Chair: Mirza Balic,
mirza.balic@georgia.sierraclub.org

Meetings: 3rd Thursday, 7:00 p.m., Berkmar High School, 405 Pleasant Hill Rd, Lilburn 30047

LaGrange Group

Serving the LaGrange area

Chair: Dean Rogers, dean@mediamindz.com

Conservation Chair: David Wappler,
david.wappler@gmail.com

Outings Chair: Elizabeth Appleby,
ecappleby@yahoo.com

Meetings: 1st Thursday, 6:30 p.m. St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Parish Hall, 207 North Greenwood St.

Metro Atlanta Group

Serving Atlanta, Dekalb, & South Fulton

Chair: Gordon Draves,
nonsmoke4ga@hotmail.com

Outings Chair: Martin McConaughy
mcmarty@bellsouth.net

Conservation Chair: Nancy Wylie,
nancywylie@mindspring.com

Meetings: 2nd Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Episcopal Church of the Epiphany • 2089 Ponce de Leon Ave. (between Atlanta and Decatur).

Savannah River Group

Serving Augusta & surrounding areas

Co-Chair: Judy Gordon, Ph.D.,
gordonjudith@att.net

Co-Chair: Sam Booher, sbooher@aol.com

Conservation Chair: Denice Traina,
yboty@aol.com

Outings Chair: Cindy Annis, ctreehuggr@aol.com

Meetings: 3rd Tuesday, 6:30 p.m., Unitarian Church on Walton Way, Augusta at 7:30 pm.

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Macon

Fletcher Winston, winston_f@mercer.edu

North Ga. Conservation Group

Larry Winslett, winfog@windstream.net

Valdosta

Brian Day, bjday@valdosta.edu

Looking for a Group near your home?

The Georgia Chapter website (<http://georgia.sierraclub.org/>) contains a map showing the locations of all Groups. Or, call the Chapter office at (404) 607-1262.

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Georgia Chapter Office

743 East College Avenue, Suite B
Decatur, Georgia 30030
404-607-1262 • FAX: 404-876-5260
georgia.chapter@sierraclub.org

Directions to take MARTA to the Sierra Club

office: Our office is an easy 1-2-minute walk from the MARTA Avondale station (E7). We encourage you to take MARTA when possible. Exit the MARTA station towards the SOUTH PARKING LOT, located on the East College Ave side. Once outside, proceed to the right towards Sams Street. Cross over Sams St. and the office is the building located right behind the convenience store. The office is the second door from Sams St. — Suite B.

Stay Informed!

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Subscribe to Georgia Chapter Online E-Newsletter at:

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Visit the Ga. Chapter web page and click on "Local Groups" for info on local groups e-mail lists.

Chapter ExCom Meeting

The next meeting is Saturday, Jan. 15th from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Chapter office. Meetings are open to the membership. For more information, call the Chapter office at 404-607-1262 x. 221.



PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID

Outings and Events

Sierra Club Outings provide a variety of opportunities for people to enjoy the beautiful outdoors. To find out more about what outings are being offered, please visit our web-site at <http://georgia.sierraclub.org/outings>.

Saturday, February 26

Panther Creek Falls via East Cowpen Trail

Location: Chatsworth, GA

Rated: { 6 miles / 2 to 3 mph / 1000 ft elev gain }

Description: Cohutta Wilderness Area: Learn about one of Georgias largest wilderness areas in the Chattahoochee National Forest. We will have lunch at the falls near a beautiful grove of hemlocks. Learn about how a state highway was turned into one of Georgias premier wilderness areas. LIMIT: 10. CONTACT: Volunteer Leader Lee Thomas at (770)-458-3389

About Georgia Sierran

Advertising is welcomed! See our new, downloadable rate card at http://georgia.sierraclub.org/news/ga_sierran_rate_card.pdf.

Articles: Send materials to: gasierran@gmail.com. Maximum word length: 750 words with one photo. Please include high-resolution digital photos (200 dpi) with your story. Moving? Send address changes to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80322-2968. Send changes by email: address.changes@sierraclub.org

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Don't forget to purchase your Sierra Club tag



See page 12 for more information.

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