

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • JAN / FEB / MAR 2020



NEW YEAR, NEW DIRECTOR • PAGE 2

PLUS A RE-INTRODUCTION TO THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER
RESULTS OF THE GEORGIA POWER RATE CASE • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS • AND MORE

FROM THE CHAPTER CHAIR

There's a saying that 20% of people do 80% of the work in the world. Lately, I've begun to believe that there is a Sierra Club corollary to that rule: In environmental work, it's more like 2% of the people do 80% of the work to preserve and protect our planet.

Among that 2%, there are a tiny few people who make a serious difference every day. We are very fortunate to have hired one of those rare people as the new Chapter Director for your Georgia Sierra Club.

Jessica Morehead has been on our staff for nearly four years. She's moved up through the staff ranks as she has shown her value as an organizer, motivator, and finally, a leader. For the last half of 2019, we asked Jessica to step into the role of Interim Chapter Director. At the January ExCom meeting, the volunteer leadership of the Chapter unanimously voted to remove Interim from her title. Jessica is our new Chapter Director.

For the Georgia Chapter, 2020 will be a big year. As usual, we will be actively engaged at the Gold Dome championing good ideas and fighting back bad ones. We will continue our work on the ground and in federal court to protect Georgia's forests. We are ramping up a major campaign to protect the Okefenokee Swamp from titanium mining. We are organizing Ready For 100 sustainable energy campaigns in several Georgia cities. We are continuing to fight for



JESSICA MOREHEAD



JEFF SCHOENBERG

energy equity before the Public Service Commission. And of course, we will be working our tails off to get environmental champions elected up and down the ballot in this pivotal election year. In all of that work, Jessica will be leading the charge.

Since taking on the role of Chapter Chair just over one year ago, I have seen the Georgia Chapter grow in staffing, budgeting and, importantly, ambition. Jessica has helped build

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Subscriptions

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Visit the Georgia Chapter Office

Our office is a two-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 E. College Avenue side. Once outside, proceed down the stairway and turn left toward Sams Street. Cross over Sams Street and the office is behind the bakery. Look for the playground behind the building. Enter the fenced gate. The office is the second door from Sams Street on the right.

On the Cover

Photo: Sierra Club Georgia Chapter activists march in Atlanta's MLK Jr. Day event. Credit: Jillian Eller

FROM THE CHAPTER CHAIR (CONTINUED)

this new Sierra Club, and she has the organizing skills to manage it. We are counting on her to keep us focused, nimble, and energized about the critical work ahead.

If you are part of that critical 2% who are already in this fight, you know how great Jessica is to work with.

If you haven't joined in yet, 2020 is the perfect year to lean in to working with the Sierra Club. We've got a whole lot to accomplish and a leader we believe in.

Jeff Schoenberg
CHAPTER CHAIR

CHAPTER NEWS

WELCOME TIA AND ANGELA!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter welcomed two new staff members in late 2019: Tia Fay and Angela Jiang. Please help us give them a warm Sierran welcome!

Tia Fay has joined the Chapter as our new administrative assistant, working to support Sierra Club members and volunteers across the state and keeping our office running smoothly. Before joining our staff, Tia worked for nearly a decade with Break Way to promote active citizenship through community-based learning and social justice education.



TIA FAY

Outside the office, Tia enjoys building furniture, spending time outdoors, and tinkering on the pottery wheel.

Angela Jiang is the Chapter's new conservation organizer and specializes in youth organizing, civic engagement, and immigrant rights. She'll be helping with our conservation campaigns, including Ready for 100.



ANGELA JIANG

Angela graduated with a B.S. in Environmental Sciences from Emory University, where she is an active alumna in its sustainability community. She's also an avid home cook and baker with a strong love for watersports.

Check our directory (page 22) for Tia and Angela's contact info.

We're so excited to start 2020 with this crew and look forward to all we will accomplish this year!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS!

More than 100 Sierra Club Georgia Chapter members cast a ballot in the fall to elect new members of our Executive Committee, who were formally seated at the Executive Committee's November meeting.

Congratulations to our new ExCom members: **Berneta Haynes**, **Tejas Kotak**, and **Stacy Shelton**! And congrats to our ExCom Chair, **Jeff Schoenberg**, on winning reelection.

Berneta, an attorney, serves as the senior director of policy and access at Georgia Watch, a consumer advocacy organization.

Tejas is a senior transportation planner at the Atlanta Regional Commission and is currently the chair of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's RAIL Committee.

Stacy is an associate attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center, working on issues related to coal ash and the Plant Vogtle expansion.

We're so glad to have these new perspectives on our Executive Committee!

We also extend a big thank you to outgoing Executive Committee members Yeou-Rong Jih, David Emory, and Shelby Buso!



BERNETA HAYNES



TEJAS KOTAK



STACY SHELTON



JEFF SCHOENBERG

HOLIDAY PARTY 2019



THANKS FOR CELEBRATING WITH US!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter had a busy 2019. We fought to stop a mine that threatens the Okefenokee Swamp. We rallied outside the Public Service Commission to push for more clean energy and to prevent electricity rates from being raised on vulnerable Georgians. We ramped up efforts to get more cities to commit to 100 percent clean energy.

After such a busy year, it was wonderful to celebrate our work in 2019 with our Sierra Club family at our holiday party in December. The potluck dinner was a huge success. We honored several volunteers for their work in 2019 (see page 5), you helped us raise quite a bit of money for the chapter, and, thanks to our fantastic DJ, Mike Zarin of Zegi, the dance floor was well used by the end of the night!

Many thanks to everyone who volunteered at the party — and to all who volunteered their time and talents throughout 2019. The Georgia Chapter wouldn't be what it is today without the hard work of our fantastic team of volunteers. We're so thankful for all you do.

Now, let's keep our momentum going into 2020! A new legislative session is underway, and a massively consequential election is looming for Georgia, and our country at large. We face continued threats to our wild places, and now more than ever, we need each and every one of you to help us make a difference. Check out our website (sierraclub.org/georgia) for the latest on our work and how you can pitch in!

To see more photos from our holiday party, check out our SmugMug photo gallery at gasierraclub.smugmug.com. To watch our 2019 Year in Review video, visit bit.ly/EOYVideo2019.

VOLUNTEER AWARDS 2019

CONGRATS TO THE WINNERS OF OUR 2019 VOLUNTEER AWARDS!

The Georgia Chapter recognized its outstanding volunteer leaders for 2019 as part of our Holiday Celebration. The honorees were:

Nina Dutton (top right), for Group Leadership. Nina has consistently done a phenomenal job providing the Metro Atlanta Group membership with information and inspiration.

Marie Neff (second right), winner of the Stella Marie Schmitter Award for Behind the Scenes Impact. Marie, an HR professional, has been critical to addressing our staffing challenges in 2019 and deserves great credit for the quality of our new hires.

Frank Carl, winner of the Ogden Doremus Award for Conservation Leadership. Frank has led the Savannah River Group's conservation efforts since 2011, has a long and distinguished history protecting local waterways, and in 2019 was outspoken in resisting an unworkable, scam "waste-to-energy" plant in Augusta.

Lee Graham, winner of the Outings Leadership Award. Lee spearheads an active and popular outings calendar at Centennial Group. He was also instrumental in establishing the outings program Chapter-wide. We honored him for his long and continuing service to the club.

Eddie Ehlert (third right) was named the winner of the Chuck McGrady Award for Political Acumen. Eddie chairs the Chapter Political Committee and represents us on the national Political Committee as well. He will be heading up some of our most critical efforts in 2020.

And finally, we recognized the **Centennial Group** (chair Lynn Walston bottom right) as the Outstanding Group for 2019. Centennial has a vibrant membership that engaged effectively in community, conservation and political issues in 2019. The Group has dedicated leaders and is a major asset to the civic life of Cobb County where they are based.



WHO WE ARE

Sierra Club Georgia Chapter

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is the most enduring and influential grassroots environmental organization in the state of Georgia, and our members and supporters include more than 75,000 of your friends and neighbors.

The Chapter has a long history of advocating for the environment in Georgia. Established in 1983, the Chapter has fought to preserve and protect the

Okefenokee Swamp, National Forests, rivers, lakes, and other special places in Georgia. We also campaign for a just transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy, and the expansion of transit across the state.

We actively lobby all levels of government in Georgia to advocate for pro-environmental policies, inspire deep connections to the natural world through our outings program, and work to build movements among environmental activists at events throughout the year.

STAFF

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter staff fulfills administrative and programmatic roles including member outreach and support, campaign organizing, communications, fundraising and more.

Jessica Morehead

Role: Chapter Director
Email: jessica.morehead@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: In 2003, I moved to Argentina to dance tango!



Gina Webber

Role: Development Associate
Email: gina.webber@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: One of my favorite hobbies is windsurfing.



Angela Jiang

Role: Conservation Organizer
Email: angela.jiang@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: I am an escape room enthusiast and have escaped over 30 rooms with my partner.



Jillian Eller

Role: Conservation Fellow
Email: jillian.eller@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: I love to hunt mushrooms (especially morels) because my great grandmother used to take me when I visited in rural Indiana when I was little.



Ricky Leroux

Role: Communications Coordinator
Email: ricky.leroux@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: My life's goal is to visit every National Park. I've crossed off 15 so far and plan on visiting three more this year.



Tia Fay

Role: Administrative Assistant
Email: tia.fay@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: I enjoy building furniture and tinkering on the pottery wheel, forever in pursuit of a perfect water pitcher.



Lornett Vestal

Role: Campaign Representative, Sierra Club Military Outdoors
Email: lornett.vestal@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: I've traveled to over 13 countries.

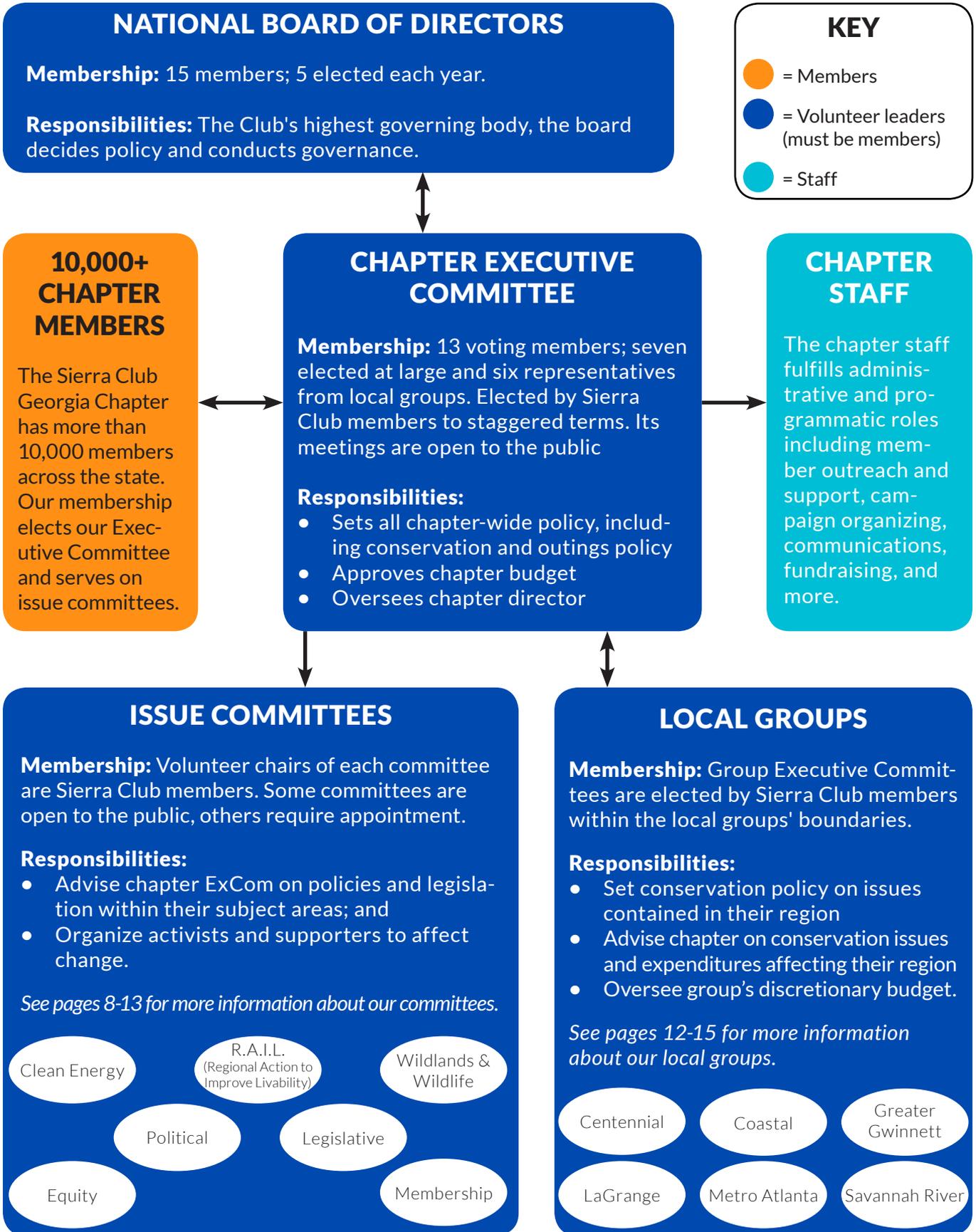


Neil Sardana

Role: Georgia Beyond Coal Organizer
Email: neil.sardana@sierraclub.org
Fun Fact: I used to perform Bhangra and other folk dances from India in front of large live audiences.



CHAPTER STRUCTURE



ISSUE COMMITTEES

The Georgia Chapter's work is divided among several issue committees, each focused on a different topic. The committees consider policies, legislation, ideas, and efforts related to their particular topic areas.

Committees advise our Executive Committee, advocate for Club and Chapter positions, and educate members, elected officials, and the public.

Club members and interested activists are welcome to attend committee meetings and bring up issues the committee might be interested in.

The meetings for each committee are typically on the days listed below unless the meeting needs to be rescheduled due to a holiday or other event.

All meetings can be found on our online calendar at sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar.

Clean Energy Committee

Staff Contacts: Angela Jiang, angela.jiang@sierraclub.org, Neil Sardana, neil.sardana@sierraclub.org

Meetings: First Wednesday, third Monday of each month

The Clean Energy Committee works in concert with the Beyond Coal and Ready for 100 campaigns to promote a just transition to clean, renewable energy all across Georgia.



The RF100 team works together with cities, counties, and college campuses to commit to and implement a just, clean energy transition.

The Beyond Coal Campaign works to shut down coal-fired power plants, push for more renewable energy, and advocates for responsible cleanup of toxic coal ash.

Read more at sierraclub.org/georgia/cefa.

Legislative Committee

Chair: Mark Woodall, woodall-mark8@gmail.com

Meetings: As needed



The Legislative Committee works to keep Georgia's lawmakers accountable to the people and the environment. The committee, in concert with the Executive Committee,

takes positions on bills and advocates for their passage or organizes in opposition.

Read more at sierraclub.org/georgia/legislative.

Political Committee

Chair: Eddie Ehlert, edehlert@mindspring.com

Meetings: As needed

The Political Committee works to ensure that there are environmental champions at all levels of government. To accomplish this goal, the committee researches candidates and recommends political endorsements to our Executive Committee.



Read more at sierraclub.org/georgia/political.

R.A.I.L. Committee

Chair: Tejas Kotak, tkotak013@gmail.com

Meetings: Monthly, fourth Monday of each month

The Regional Action to Improve Livability (R.A.I.L.) Committee advocates for transportation choices, such as mass-transit and biking, and transit-oriented development in Georgia. We believe that traveling by car should be just one of many options available to Georgians.



Read more at sierraclub.org/georgia/rail.

Wildlands & Wildlife Committee

Chair: Larry Winslett, winfog@windstream.net

Meetings: Second Monday of each month

The Wildlands & Wildlife Committee advocates for responsible management and protection of our public lands and wild forests and work to preserve and expand habitats that protect vulnerable wildlife.



Read more at sierraclub.org/georgia/wildlands.

BEYOND COAL

Sierra Club extremely disappointed in results of GA Power's latest rate case

STEPHEN STETSON, SENIOR CAMPAIGN REPRESENTATIVE, BEYOND COAL CAMPAIGN

After months of public comment, expert testimony, and consumer protests across the state, the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) voted on Dec. 17 to give a sizable victory to Georgia Power in a set of proceedings that will determine the price of electricity in coming years. Put bluntly, customers across Georgia can expect to see power bills go up, partially due to the costs of cleaning up pollution caused by burning coal.

Known as a “rate case,” the months-long set of hearings were open to the public, and Sierra Club formally intervened in the process to recommend some changes to Georgia Power’s proposed financial plans. Most significantly, we opposed the utility’s proposal to increase a monthly fee that would increase costs for customers, no matter how much electricity was used. This “fixed charge” approach to billing discourages conservation, but the PSC voted to award Georgia Power a \$4 per month increase, about half of what was being requested.

We also objected to the company’s plans to pass on coal ash cleanup costs to consumers because existing cleanup plans are too vague. Coal ash contains many poisonous heavy metals and dangerous residues from the coal combustion process, and Georgia Power has millions of tons of ash stored in locations across the state. Georgia Power is planning on excavating many of its toxic coal ash sites, but the company is also leaving many of the sites in place alongside riverbanks and will merely put a “cap” on top of the ash.

Unfortunately, the Georgia PSC didn’t follow the advice of the expert testimony introduced by



Thanks to everyone who showed up to our rallies outside the Public Service Commission and helped fight against Georgia Power's rate hike.

Sierra Club. Instead, a majority of the Commission (a five-person panel elected in statewide elections) opted to prefer the terms of a settlement between the utility and big business interests. Under the conditions of the final order, the company will be entitled to extremely robust profits, while passing billions of dollars in expenses onto customers’ utility bills.

One silver lining was the inclusion of a modest electric vehicle charging program into the final plan. And another positive is a provision boosting the economics for rooftop solar customers who may be considering installing a new residential set of solar panels. But EVs and rooftop solar are not yet the norm for most Georgians. The reality is that power bills will be going up, and nearly a third of the dirty coal ash ponds will remain in place – leaking legacies of dirty energy choices that imperil our waters.

At press time, Sierra Club's legal team was continuing to deliberate about next steps, including the possibility of appealing a final decision.

READY FOR 100

The Ready for 100 campaign looking to expand in 2020

JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION FELLOW, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

Are you ready for clean energy? The Sierra Club’s

Ready For 100 campaign advocates for an affordable and equitable energy system powered by clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar. The time for 100% clean, renewable energy in the United States has come; we need to urgently address the climate crisis now.

The RF100 campaign works with cities, counties,

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



states, and college campuses to commit to a transition to clean, renewable energy. It calls for clean electricity no later than 2035, and clean energy for transportation and building heating and cooling no later than 2050. Currently, 154 cities (including four in Georgia), 13 counties, and seven states have made this commitment. This includes four cities in Georgia: Atlanta, Athens, Augusta, and Clarkston. See sierraclub.org/ready-for-100 for more information.

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Ready for 100 Campaign made tremendous progress this past year. The city of Atlanta published a comprehensive implementation plan for their clean energy transition in spring 2019 (see 100atl.org), and the city is moving forward with energy efficiency programs.

Solar efforts surged across the board as well. Given the plummeting costs of integration, the swell of providers, and the increase of required solar passed by the Public Service Commission in the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan, we can expect this trend to continue.

Meanwhile, Athens/Clarke County passed a resolution committing to transition to 100% clean, renewable energy in spring 2019 and successfully secured \$15 million in funding for implementation in fall 2019 through their SPLOST referendum. We will be working with them to support their implementation efforts. Augusta and Clarkston have also passed 100% resolutions.

At the chapter level, we have brought on board Angela Jiang, our new Conservation Organizer who will help propel the RF100 campaign forward. Additionally, we continued to deepen our relationships with various environmental justice and equity organizations.

Looking forward to the new year, the Ready for 100 Campaign is dedicating more capacity to a just



and equitable transition for all. Here in Georgia, we are very excited to support more communities, including Decatur and Smyrna, in passing resolutions to transition to 100% clean, renewable energy in the coming year.

Each location has its own team of residents and dedicated Sierra Club members that are supported by a larger cohort of chapter and national support. We are expanding our volunteer capacity, and are looking for dedicated individuals to join our chapter-level Ready for 100 team as well as individual location-based teams.

We are also continuing our partnership with the Beyond Coal Campaign to align on strategy and power building. Together, we meet as the Clean Energy Committee typically on the first Wednesday and third Monday of each month at the Georgia Chapter office in Decatur from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Please check the Chapter's calendar online to double check the meeting date and to RSVP.

Want to get involved? We need volunteers to build this movement! Contact Angela Jiang at angela.jiang@sierraclub.org to get started.

LEGISLATIVE

Georgia's legislative session is underway, get involved!

**RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER**

The second leg of the Georgia Legislature's 2019-20 session is underway, and the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is working to get a wide variety of bills passed.

Here's the good news: Bills that would require that toxic coal ash be stored in lined landfills, expand transit opportunities in rural areas, and reestablish a tax credit for electric vehicles are all getting serious attention this year.

The bad news is that these bills face an uphill battle on their way to the governor's desk. We need your help to give these bills a fighting chance to become law.

HELP FIGHT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN GEORGIA

First, sign up for updates at our hub for online campaigns at sierraclub.org/georgia/action.

Add your name to our campaigns for clean energy, transportation and good government, and we'll let you know when key bills are coming up for a vote and help you contact your lawmaker.

There are several great tools about learning how



to lobby on our Legislative Committee's website at sierraclub.org/georgia/legislative.

One of those tools is our new bill tracker that automatically updates any time there is movement on one of our priority pieces of legislation.

We have the opportunity to make real change here in Georgia and improve the lives of everyone living in it. The Legislature is only in session for 40 days every year, so let's make it count!

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POLITICAL

Check your voter registration!

**RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER**

Make sure you can make your voice heard in this year's elections by checking your voter registration.

The Georgia Secretary of State's voter registration website can be found at mvp.sos.ga.gov. On that page, voters can:

- Register to vote;
- Confirm their registration status;
- Submit address changes;

- Find their polling place;
- Check for early voting locations and hours;
- Apply for an absentee ballot; and
- View personalized sample ballots for upcoming elections.

The page also contains information about each voters' elected officials at the federal, state, and local level as well as a link to the list of all candidates who have qualified for upcoming elections.

April 20 is the deadline to be registered for the May 19 general primaries, so make sure you will be able to make your voice heard at the ballot box by checking your registration ahead of time!

A year of progress for transit

TEJAS KOTAK, CHAIR, R.A.I.L. COMMITTEE

Last year began in a flurry of activity for us as we geared up for the Gwinnett MARTA referendum. While we lost this one – largely due to it being on an uncommon election day – we are confident that the majority of the county is pro-transit. There’s a good chance we will get another go at it in November 2020, so be ready to organise around that and other environmental issues.

There has been a lot of quiet but vital work on transit issues in the past few months, too. The ATL Board recently approved a \$27 billion dollar transit plan for the metro Atlanta region. This plan will be updated every year as cities, counties, and transit operators develop new projects and ideas. Some of the projects in the current plan will be submitted to the Georgia Legislature for state funding. We will be closely watching that process and will hopefully get some state money for transit.

MARTA is continuing to make progress on its More MARTA program in the city of Atlanta and has ordered new rail cars that will begin rolling on our tracks by 2023. This represents the first time MARTA is fully switching out its railcar fleet – some of which are the originals from the 1970s. The upgrade should improve the passenger experience and travel reliability.

Douglas County launched an intra-county bus system in 2019 with connections to MARTA and GRTA Xpress buses. Ridership has been trending upward

for it, and there’s good hope that it will become more fully integrated into the regional system in the coming years.

The University of Georgia has ordered 20 electric buses to update its on-campus transit program, and this will be one of the largest electric fleets in the nation. We hope that UGA’s success with electric buses will encourage other transit providers and universities will follow their lead.

There will be several opportunities to get transit and transportation work done in 2020. There is the aforementioned Gwinnett MARTA referendum we expect in November, working with the new Atlanta DOT as it continues to form, and continued efforts in Cobb, Gwinnett, and around the state to promote the benefits of transit.

The legislative session is already underway, and we have two big bills we are looking out for: HB 511, a rural transit bill, and HB 732, an EV tax credit bill. HB 511 would create a new state agency focused on transit planning and create rural transit districts around the state to encourage transit use, planning, funding in Georgia’s rural counties.

HB 732 would reinstate the tax credit for EVs and other alternative fuel cars at \$2,500. Sierra Club is supporting both of these bills and will work to ensure they both pass. For more info about our transit legislation campaigns, visit bit.ly/GATransportation

There were some quiet periods for transit in 2019, but there is little chance of that at any time in 2020. We have a busy year ahead of us, so gear up to advocate, vote, and get our state some more buses and trains.



Latest on Okefenokee mine, Foothills Landscape projects

**RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER**

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is continuing its efforts to stop a mining operation that plans to set up just outside the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Thanks to everyone who sent in comments to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers urging them to deny the permits required by the mine.

In early February, Twin Pines Minerals, the company seeking to set up the mine, has withdrawn its application for the necessary permits from the USACE. However, the company quickly announced it would be resubmitting its application for a smaller project area.

By resubmitting their permit for a smaller area, the company may be trying to skirt being required to conduct a full environmental impact statement, which would require a more substantial evaluation of the project's effects on the area.

Once the permit is resubmitted, there will likely be another opportunity for the public to comment on the project.

Stay up to date on the project and our efforts to stop it at bit.ly/Okefenokee.

A second round of thanks to everyone who sent in comments in opposition to the U.S. Forest Service's Foothills Landscape Project. Through this project, the Forest Service is seeking approval for a variety of actions, including logging, prescribed burning, herbicide application and more, across about 157,000 acres that spans eight Georgia counties.

However, the Forest Service is not providing specifics about where these actions would take place, instead asking for blanket permission for the entire project area. This makes it exceedingly difficult to assess the environmental impacts of the Forest Service's actions.

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is opposed to the project as currently planned, but has been working with our allies and the Forest Service in an attempt to address the issues we have with the proposal.

Public comment on the project ended in January, but we're keeping an eye on the Forest Service for their next steps. We've also filed requests under the Freedom of Information Act for more information from the Forest Service.

Join the Wildlands & Wildlife Committee email list at sierraclub.org/georgia/wildlands to stay up to date on this project and other committee action.

Your IRA was always designed to be used in the future.



Now, you can use it to help ensure the future.

YOU CAN PUT YOUR IRA TO WORK FOR THE PLANET AND SAVE ON YOUR TAXES THIS YEAR

An IRA Charitable Rollover provides an opportunity to make a charitable gift to count toward your required minimum distribution and potentially reduce your taxes - even if you are taking the standard deduction for 2018.

If you are at least 70½ years old, you can now transfer up to \$100,000 directly to the Sierra Club Foundation from your IRA without paying income tax on the withdrawal.

Questions? Contact Jessica Morehead at jessica.morehead@sierraclub.org

Please note the Sierra Club Foundation does not offer legal, tax, or financial planning advice. You are encouraged to consult your own legal counsel, tax advisor, and/or financial planner.

The Foundation for a Healthy Planet.
SierraClubFoundation.org



Georgia's first National Park?

Study to examine redesignating Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park

**RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER**

Fresh off the massive expansion and renaming of the Ocmulgee Mounds Historical Park, a study is examining whether to turn the area into Georgia's first national park.

The Atlanta Journal Constitution's Charles Seabrook reports that a "special resource study" authorized by Congress in 2019 will consider the feasibility of redesignating the park, located in middle Georgia just outside the Macon city limits.

"The study, which may take more than two years, could recommend to Congress that the river corridor become a national park, a national recreation area or some other type of preserve within the National Park System," writes Seabrook.

The same bill authorizing the study also expanded the park from 700 acres to 2,800 acres and renamed the park from "Ocmulgee National Monument" to "Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park."

Kensy Rabun, executive director of the Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative (ONPPI), said the National Park Service's study is already underway and is projected to have a three-year timeline.

Rabun said the site represents 17,000 years of Native American culture and includes the "greatest ceremonial center in the Southeast" and a river corridor with unique biological diversity.

The area, known by the indigenous Muscogee Creek people as the "Old Fields," was largely unexplored by archaeologists until the 1930s. Congress finally authorized the park as a National Monument in 1934, and it took another two years before the park was formally established on Dec. 23, 1936

Rabun is optimistic that the area could be designated as a National Park.



The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is a long-time supporter of the efforts to expand the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. Above, Sierra Club members and volunteers celebrate after an outing to the area in 2016.

"I believe we have a great possibility of success if every effort is made," Rabun said.

The Sierra Club played a key role in the grassroots efforts of the ONPPI by writing letters and making phone calls to legislators to encourage support for the bill, Rabun added.

According to a 2017 study commissioned by the National Parks Conservation Association and the Knight Foundation, the creation of an Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve would lead to a significant increase in economic activity in the region.

That report estimates that within 15 years of the new Ocmulgee National Park's creation, the area could see visitation increase from a little more than 200,000 people annually to more than 1.16 million. This jump in visitation would lead to a \$206.7 million increase in annual economic activity in the region around the park, according to the study, in part through the creation of an additional 2,800+ jobs.

Georgia contains multiple units of the National Park Service, including national heritage areas, national historic sites, national recreation areas and more, but none of these are officially designated as "National Parks."

For more information about the park, visit nps.gov/ocmu. To learn more about the effort to designate the area as a National Park, connect with the Ocmulgee National Park and Preserve Initiative citizens group at ocmulgeepark.org.



Photo of the Ocmulgee Mounds courtesy of the National Park Service.

In case you missed it...

The Georgia Water Coalition's 2019 Dirty Dozen includes several coal ash issues, protecting the Okefenokee Swamp, and more

**RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER**

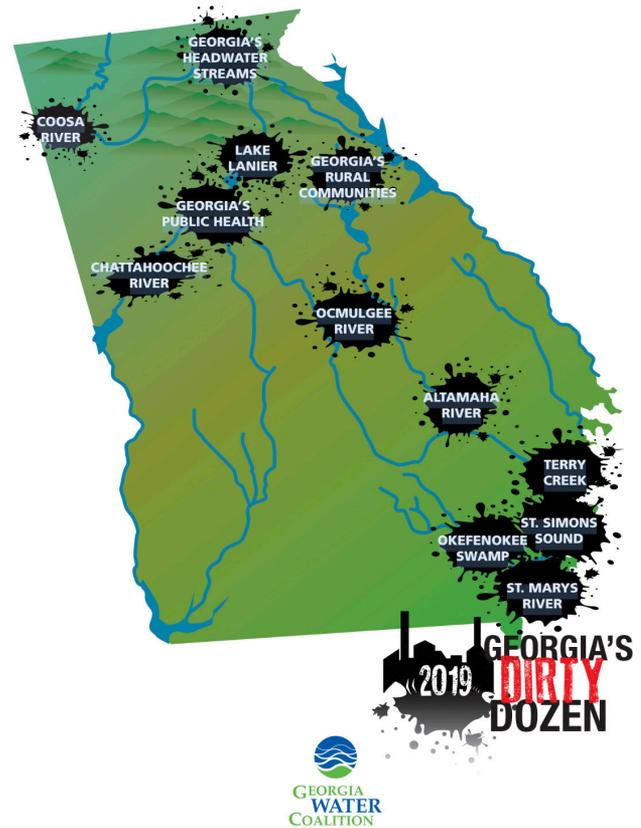
In November, the Georgia Water Coalition (GWC) released its annual “Dirty Dozen” list for 2019 highlighting 12 of the worst threats to Georgia’s waters. It’s not a list of the most polluted places in the state, but instead the top 12 politics, policies, and issues that pose the greatest danger to the health of Georgia’s water and the well-being of its citizens.

“We wished we didn’t need to publish this report,” said Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman, Executive Director and Riverkeeper with the Coosa River Basin Initiative in Rome. “But, every year, new threats to Georgia’s water arise and unfortunately, the state’s lax enforcement of environmental laws and its failure to fully-fund important environmental programs continues.”

In fact, seven of the 12 issues highlighted in the GWC’s report are making return appearances on the list.

The “Dirty Dozen” for 2019 were:

- **Altamaha River:** Rayonier Advanced Materials chemical pulp mill in Jesup makes record seventh appearance in Dirty Dozen report.
- **Chattahoochee River:** Georgia Power Company determines “safe” coal ash cleanup plans for power plants in Cobb, Coweta and Carroll counties while Georgia leaders are idle on stronger requirements.
- **Coosa River:** Suspect coal ash disposal plan threatens river and groundwater.
- **Georgia’s Headwater Streams:** Rollback to federal environmental rules endangers national forests, the birthplaces of Georgia’s drinking water sources.
- **Georgia’s Public Health:** Legislative budget writers continue stealing from environmental funds and delay hazardous waste cleanups.
- **Georgia’s Rural Communities:** Proposed legislation would stomp on rural property rights and welcome industrial agriculture — and its pollution — to Georgia (HB 545).
- **Lake Lanier:** Chronic pollution at a private sewage treatment plant highlights the state’s failure to enforce clean water standards.
- **Ocmulgee River:** Coal ash ponds pollute drinking water in Monroe and MaconBibb counties.
- **Okefenokee Swamp:** Proposed 2,400-acre titanium mine threatens signature landscape of Georgia.
- **St. Mary’s River:** Legislative loophole invites out-of-



state toxic coal ash to Georgia landfills, including one in Charlton County

- **St. Simons Sound:** Cargo ship disaster fouls marshes and beaches
- **Terry Creek:** Proposed federal cleanup plan for toxic site in Brunswick leaves locals fuming.

Many of the issues highlighted in the GWC’s report area Sierra Club Georgia Chapter priorities, including protecting the Okefenokee, stopping HB 545 from rolling back property rights of rural landowners, fighting against the rollback of federal environmental rules, and cleaning up toxic coal ash stored across the state.

The Georgia Water Coalition is a consortium of more than 250 conservation and environmental organizations, including the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, as well as hunting and fishing groups, businesses, and faith-based organizations that have been working to protect Georgia’s water since 2002. The Dirty Dozen report serves as a call to action for Georgia’s leaders and its citizens to fix these threats to Georgia’s water.



You're Invited to Join Us

for the Georgia Water Coalition's
3rd Annual "Clean 13" Water Heroes Celebration

Thursday, March 12, 2020
from 6 - 9 p.m.

Mason Fine Art
415 Plasters Avenue
Atlanta, Georgia 30324

www.gawater.org/clean-13



EVENTS

Save the date!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is bringing the No Man's Land Film Festival back to GA

In July 2019, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter partnered with Patagonia Atlanta to bring the No Man's Land Film Festival to Georgia.

It was such a success, we're bringing the festival back in 2020!

This year's edition of the film festival will take place on **June 5, 2020**.

The all-women adventure film festival aims to un-define feminine in adventure and sport through film. The chosen films in the festival champion women-identified athletes, storytellers, and creatives who find inspiration and motivation through adventure, sport, and film.

Once again, the film festival will be hosted at the Fran- nie Graves Auditorium in Campbell Hall on the campus of Agnes Scott College, a private women's college in Decatur.

The auditorium is ADA accessible and all genders are welcome.

Join us at 5:30 p.m. for a beer and a chance to meet



FILM FESTIVAL NO MAN'S LAND™

JUNE 6, 2020

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE IN DECATUR

people from local organizations that focus on women in the outdoors!

The films start at 6:30 p.m.

General admission is \$12, and student tickets are only \$6! All proceeds go to support the great work of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter.

Visit bit.ly/NMLFF2020GA to learn more and purchase tickets.

Volunteers are needed to help with set up from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. and with clean up from 9 to 10 p.m. Contact Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org to sign up to help.

CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2020 CALENDAR

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom) meets every other month at the Chapter office (743 E. College Avenue, Decatur).

Georgia Chapter ExCom meetings are open to the public, and all are welcome to attend.

Meeting dates are subject to change, so check our online calendar to confirm the dates.

The Georgia Chapter ExCom's 2020 meetings are scheduled for:

- March 21st - Noon
- May 16th - Noon
- July 18th - Noon
- September 19th - Noon
- November 21st - Noon

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WINTER / SPRING 2019 GROUP NEWS

CENTENNIAL GROUP

SERVING COBB, CHEROKEE & NORTH FULTON

BY LINDA BELL, BETTYE HARRIS & LYNN WALSTON

HAPPY NEW YEAR AND THANK YOU!

We're looking forward to another busy, challenging, successful, and fun year in 2020 as we continue to tackle our priority issues (transit; clean energy; parks/greenspace; equity/outreach) and work to grow our membership, recruit new issue and outing leaders, and expand our group's diversity. Please let us know more about your interests by responding to the Centennial Questionnaire (check our website) we will distribute early this quarter. We could also use help tallying those results. Please consider inviting interested neighbors and friends to join you at one of our meetings or outings. Thank you for supporting us in 2019 and 2020!

END-OF-THE-YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

We had a great crowd and a successful auction at our "Centennial Potluck Party" on December 5th. Thanks to all who attended or supported the event! Special thanks to our generous donors who provided gift certificates and other auction items (see the list of donors



on our website and in our next Centennial e-newsletter; please support them). Extra special thanks to Shae & Gwenda Avery for hosting our party (for the 7th year!) at their fine art gallery just off the Marietta Square. (averygallery.com).



Angie Netterville led our final 2019 Adopt-a-Mile cleanup of the "Rushway" on Lower Roswell Road, which was adopted and dedicated in 2015 in memory and honor of our late activist, Rush Netterville. Eleven volunteers joined us and enjoyed a very fine lunch afterward.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW EXCOM MEMBERS

Welcome to our new and returning 2020 Centennial executive committee members: Lynn Walston, Linda Bell, Jenny Bartee, Todd Daniel, and Andrea Searles. A special thank you to outgoing ExCom members, Claudette Sukenick and Olivia Williams.

MORE ON TRANSIT

Advocating for transit expansion in Cobb County has long been one of the Centennial Group's initiatives and will certainly continue to be in 2020. Some of our volunteers are involved with Cobb4Transit (cobb4transit.org), a grassroots effort with that same goal that has worked hard in 2019 to improve its infrastructure, attend and advocate at public events, and become more politically involved.

We expect there to be a 2022 referendum on expanding transit for Cobb County, probably requesting a sales tax funding source, put forward by the Cobb County Board of Commissioners. We think it important to fully apply this tax to transit expansion, rather

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

than to roads and maintenance.

We expect to be a presence in upcoming 2020 Cobb BOC elections that will help determine options on the referendum. Two district seats plus the chairman's seat will be contested in 2020; we believe transit will be a major issue in all 3 races. There is much we can do to educate the public and get out the vote.

Please contact Linda Bell for more information at elbell51@yahoo.com.

GROUP INFORMATION

Monthly meetings: 1st Thursday of each month, welcome and refreshments at 7 p.m., program at 7:30 p.m.; Life University, 1269 Barclay Cir. SE, Marietta. For directions please contact Lynn Walston, lynnwalston22@yahoo.com.

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial
Facebook: facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club



GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

BY DAN FRIEDMAN

HAPPY NEW YEAR AND THANK YOU!

As we begin the new year, I am reminded of the historian adage, "If we do not learn from the past, we are doomed to repeat it." Our members were involved in many activities, too many to mention in this space, including the Gwinnett transit referendum, stream monitoring, meeting with public officials at the local, state, and federal levels, running for public office, cleaning public lands, reaching out to other environmental and ethnic groups, and attending public and educational meetings.

This is a new day, a new year. What we did last year, we will continue in 2020. Not only are there local, state, and national elections, but there are quality of life issues that will be addressed. The transit referendum likely will be return this year. The rollback of water quality regulations make our stream monitoring initiatives more important than ever. The reduction of air quality standards regulations affects the young, the old, and everyone with breathing difficulties like asthma, COPD, and emphysema.

Scientists tell us that we are losing our war on climate change. We see the effects of climate change not only in the increased temperatures and rising sea levels but also in the severity of storms. We have seen this past summer temperatures of 117 degrees in the soil, which is too hot for plants like peanuts and

soybeans. The variability of weather increases the chance of poor farm yields and higher farm prices. Global warming does not mean put on more antiperspirant; it means we spend more for food, it means more property destruction from storms, it means plants are less nutritious, it means diseases that were once confined to the tropics now affect us in the U.S. and here in Georgia.

This year is the most important year that we have seen. The direction our country and Georgia takes environmentally and politically affects not only us, but our children and grandchildren – and their children as well, who few of our generation will ever know. The stakes are high, but history has shown us that when we work together, we can overcome political intransigence, reinstate regulations that protect our health, and give our children and grandchildren a world they deserve.

It is a new year. Get involved. Make a difference.

GROUP INFORMATION

Monthly meetings: Third Thursday of each month, social at 7 p.m., program at 7:30 p.m.; Berkmar High School (405 Pleasant Hill Road, Lilburn). Enter the high school grounds from Pleasant Hill and enter the school via the covered walkway at the top of the hill.

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett

LAGRANGE GROUP

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

BY PAULA DARDEN

TAKING CLIMATE ACTION!

Fall of 2019 was a busy time for the LaGrange Group. After participating in the yearly Corps of Engineers' West Point Lake Cleanup in September, we participated in the Climate Action Rally in Opelika, Alabama, held by the Sunrise Movement, which is organizing rallies to increase awareness of climate change.

On December 6, the club, along with the LaGrange College Sustainability Council and the LaGrange Group for a Sustainable Future, held a Global Climate Change Rally in downtown LaGrange. The people who attended extended from schoolchildren to retirees.

Speakers were LaGrange Mayor Jim Thornton, climate activist John Noel, Troup County Manager Eric Mosley, Georgia Senator Randy Robertson, local physician Margaret Schaufler, Middle Chattahoochee Riverkeeper Director Henry Jacobs, and local farmer Eric Simpson. Our goal was to raise awareness of climate change among the young people of our county, college students and older citizens also.

Our fall programs were varied. We had speakers on the ecology of bats in North America, butterfly gardens and gardening with native plants, and the Citizens' Climate Change Lobby's plan to decrease our nation's carbon footprint.

Our outings were equally varied. We visited the Ocmulgee National Historical Park Indian Festival in September and we biked the Carrollton, Georgia Greenbelt in October.

In November, we participated in an educational hike led by the Georgia Botanical Society and our last outing will be a trip to the Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve.

We invite any interested Sierra Club members to join us on our outings. They are always posted on our Facebook page and in Meetup (find our Meetup page on our website).

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GROUP INFORMATION

Monthly meetings: Third Tuesday of each month, social at 6:30 p.m., program at 7 p.m.; St. Mark's Episcopal Church's Parish Hall, 207 N. Greenwood Street, LaGrange.

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/300840033370271



METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON

RECENT GROUP MEETINGS

Oct. 8: Chandra Farley, Just Energy Director at the Partnership For Southern Equity (PSE), delivered a clear and thoughtful presentation on energy equity and PSE's work, followed by discussion. The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter is a partner in the Just Energy Circle and worked with PSE this fall to organize under the #FightTheHike campaign against Georgia Power's attempt to raise our electricity bills and further burden the public with the costs of cleaning up its coal ash waste.

Meeting takeaways:

- We need a just energy system because energy inequity is pervasive and harmful.
- Some examples of energy inequity: A large majority of African-Americans live within 30 miles of coal-fired power plants, only 7% of workers in the burgeoning solar industry in 2017 were African-American, and one-third of households helped by LIHEAP (Low-Income Energy Bill Assistance Program) have at least one child.
- Atlanta is the city with the 4th highest energy burden (i.e., a high proportion of income paid for energy) in the U.S., and most of the other cities with high energy burdens are also in the South.
- Instead, we need energy equity — a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of energy production and consumption.
- How can we support PSE's energy equity work? Go to Public Service Commission (PSC) meetings (not just the major hearings like the ones last year on the Georgia Power energy plan or rate case, but also their monthly energy committee meetings), call/email PSC members, and talk with your neighbors and spread the word about what the PSC does.

Nov. 12: University of Georgia professor of geodesign Brian Orland discussed his work analyzing coastal Georgia residents' responses to recent hurricanes and using augmented reality to communicate about sea level changes and storm damage.

Meeting takeaways:

- Although the Georgia coast faces both near-term threats of destruction by hurricanes and gradual changes from sea level rise, many coastal residents are hesitant to move away, primarily because of strong social ties.
- While maps are often used to communicate about the changes that sea level rise and changing coast-

lines are expected to bring, the top-down view of a traditional map is not in line with how we experience the places in our everyday lives.

- Instead, Prof. Orland and his team are using simulated historical and projected future images to show what views from locations on the coast (such as historical markers) may have been like in the past and what they could look like in the future.
- These augmented reality experiences that Prof. Orland's group is creating can tell the story of a place in a way that may offer people a way to deeply understand what the future may hold.

December: We did not hold a typical group meeting this December, gathering instead at the Georgia Sierra Club holiday potluck party to celebrate the accomplishments of this year and look forward to the next.

MAG AT THE MLK MARCH



The Metro Atlanta Group was well represented at Atlanta's MLK Jr. Day March in January. Thanks to all who turned out!

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Want to pitch in by helping out at meetings, planning events or actions, or keeping on top of local news, policy, politics, events, and opportunities? Please email our chair, Nina Dutton, at nddutton@gmail.com.

Our executive committee meetings are open and generally held on the evening of the first Tuesday of the month. Contact Nina Dutton to confirm details.

GROUP INFORMATION

Monthly meetings: Second Tuesday of each month, social at 7 p.m., program at 7:30 p.m.; Sierra Club Georgia Chapter office, 743 E. College Avenue, Suite B, Decatur, GA 30030. Contact Nina Dutton (nddutton@gmail.com) to confirm details.

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/SierraClubATL

SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY

BEST WISHES TO SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP CO-FOUNDER JUDY GORDON

Farewell and best wishes to Judy Gordon, the co-founder of the Savannah River Group (SRG). Judy has moved to Atlanta to be closer to family. Judy's vocation was a professor of biology at Augusta University.

During that time and into her retirement years, at least from 1981 to 2019, Judy has been a volunteer and activist with the Sierra Club serving in a leadership capacity on either SRG's Executive Committee or one of the other committees.

Judy's commitment to the mission of the Sierra Club and devotion to the environment has been exemplary and some highlights of her contributions include:

- Assisting with forming the Savannah Waterways Forum to oppose the construction of an additional hydro project on the Augusta Canal. The project would have had disastrous effects on both the Canal and the Augusta Shoals, which is the last remaining shoals in the river and is especially important for protecting the shoals spider lily and anadromous fish species, such as short-nosed sturgeon which spawn in the shoals.
- Being a key player in saving the Augusta Canal from commercial development. Today there is a walking/bicycling path instead of a golf course and hotel, and the Augusta Canal is now a National Heritage Area.
- Identifying an area on the Savannah River Site (SRS) that the endangered Wood Stork foraged at a time when the government wanted to restart the L-Reactor at SRS. Because of this finding, the SRS was required to provide mitigation lands to off-set the loss of feeding areas to the Wood Stork. This win also gave the State of South Carolina permission to do some environmental monitoring at the SRS site.
- Pursuing a lawsuit through SRG against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because they allowed the Clarks Hill reservoir to flood several acres that had been designated as wildlife areas. It took several years, but the Sierra Club won and a new, larger wildlife area was established



Judy Gordon

south of Augusta on an old plantation site along the Savannah River.

- Saving and relocating some endangered trillium that was in the path of a development.
- Documenting the various plants on the Savannah Riverkeeper's new and now current site to prevent the destruction of any endangered species.
- Monitoring a creek site for Adopt-a-Stream.

We will miss her but wish her well in her new home.

CONGRATS TO OUR NEW EXCOM MEMBERS

Congratulations to our latest elected members to our Executive Committee: Cathy Black, Lawrence Komp, Tim Nelken, and Greg Sutherland.

GROUP INFORMATION

Monthly meetings: Third Tuesday of each month, 6:30 p.m., Unitarian Church on Walton Way, Augusta.

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River

SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER DIRECTORY

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For a complete listing of conservation committee chairs and issue leaders, please visit: sierraclub.org/georgia/directory.

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Outings Chair: Vacant

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Get Involved!

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sierraclub.org/georgia/volunteer

Join a Local Group
sierraclub.org/georgia/localgroups

Get Outside
sierraclub.org/georgia/outings

VISIT US ONLINE

Check out our website (sierraclub.org/georgia) to learn more about the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, access our library of resources, learn about volunteer opportunities, and more. You can also find a complete listing of all conservation committee chairs, staff members, issue leaders, and group leaders.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook: @GASierraClub

Twitter: @GASierraClub

Instagram: @GASierraClub

Meetup: Georgia Sierra Club

YouTube: Georgia Sierra Club

LinkedIn: Georgia Sierra Club

SmugMug: gasierraclub.smugmug.com