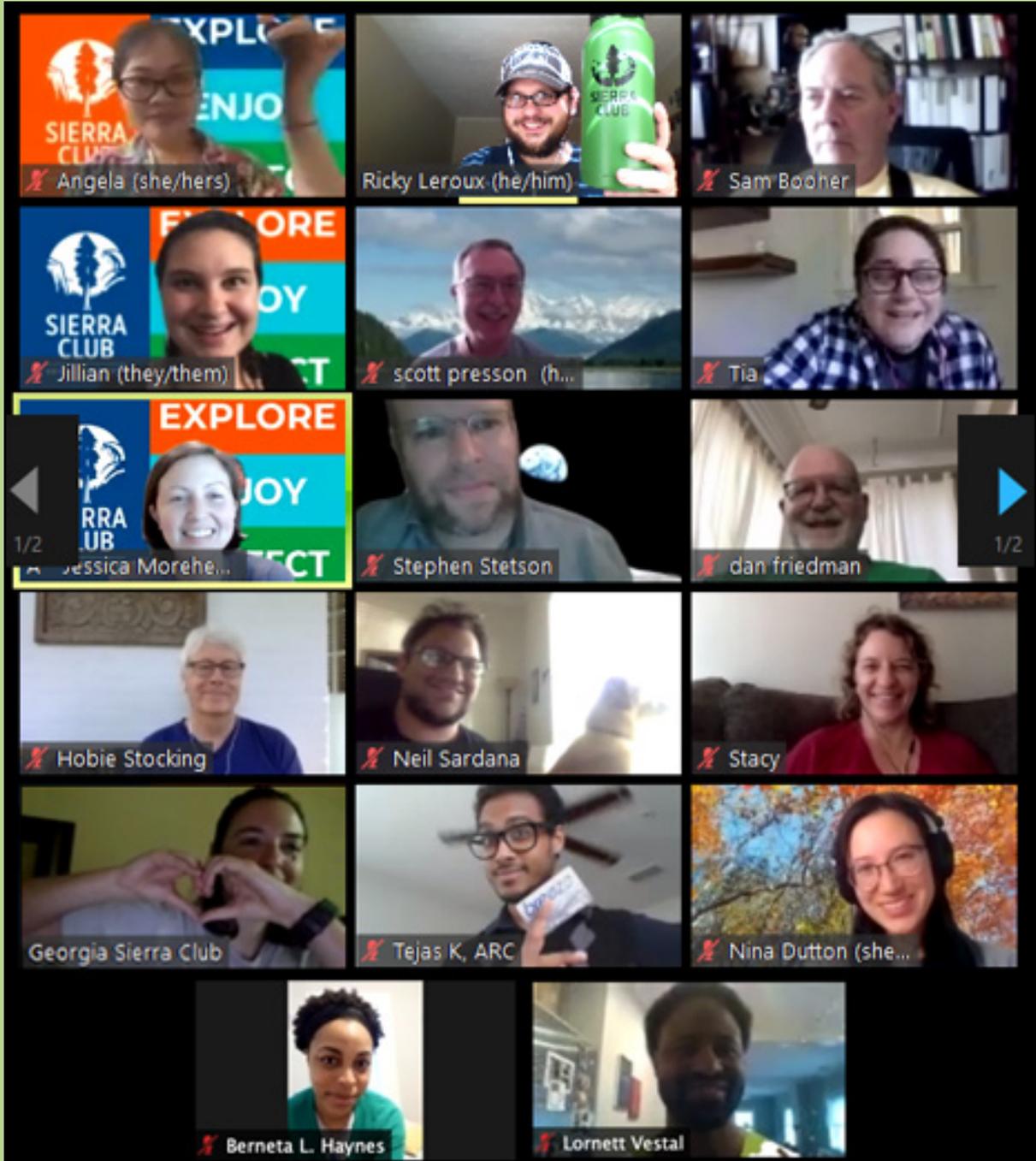


# GEORGIA SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • APR / MAY / JUNE 2020



## INSIDE: STILL DOING GOOD WORK

**PLUS** ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE WHILE SELF-ISOLATING • SAVANNAH COMMITS TO 100% CLEAN ENERGY  
PLANT WASHINGTON ENDS BEFORE IT BEGINS • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS • AND MORE

**FROM THE CHAPTER DIRECTOR**

By the time you read this, Sierra Club offices across the country will have been closed for two months. National and chapter staff continue to work from home, some thrust into full time roles as teachers, some in homes with little to no quiet space to work, some face mental health issues compounded by social distancing and isolation, and some are watching loved ones battle or succumb to COVID-19. And yet, we are the lucky ones who continue to get paid, have received additional paid time off, and are not forced to choose between our personal safety and a paycheck.



**JESSICA MOREHEAD**

you rise up to stop a dangerous mining operation from damaging our beloved Okefenokee Swamp.

With your support not only does the work continue, but so does our success. Efforts spanning a decade have put a stop to the last proposed coal plant in the nation right here in Sandersville, GA. After years of work with the Georgia Water Coalition, we've pushed Georgia's

Legislature to pass a trust fund bill that puts an important government reform on November's ballot. If voters approve, this measure will protect funding to clean up waterways and polluted areas throughout the state.

**Amidst this crisis, we are still at work. And if you are able, we still need your help.** Let me say that above all else, now is the time to take care of yourself, your family, and the community around you. Do that first. For those of you looking for ways to find meaning in the chaos, please join us. If you're not impacted by a loss of income, consider donating a little extra to make up for those who can't give this year. If you have free time on your hands and are looking to spend it in meaningful ways, join us for a virtual meeting or take action online. We are waiting to hear from you. Let us help you elevate your voice and use your talents in a way that matters. We are in this together

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# GEORGIA SIERRAN

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**On the Cover**

Photo: A screenshot of a Zoom video conference call featuring Sierra Club staff, local group chairs, executive committee members, and conservation leaders.

and we will continue to fight the good fight with you by our side.

email Tia Fay at [tia.fay@sierraclub.org](mailto:tia.fay@sierraclub.org) to learn more about how you can help!

How to stay engaged: Follow us on social media, find online events/meetings on our website calendar, and

*Jessica Morehead*  
GEORGIA CHAPTER DIRECTOR

**CHAPTER NEWS**

**LATEST UPDATES ON OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE**

We know this is a difficult time for everyone and are grateful for your continued patience and understanding as we continue our work across the state in new ways.

Here are some steps the Georgia Chapter has taken in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak:

The Georgia Chapter office in Decatur is closed until further notice.

- All Chapter staff members are working from home and are reachable via email (see the directory on page 14).
- All meetings and events are being held virtually. Check our calendar ([sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar)) to see upcoming events and RSVP.
- We are holding regular video calls with staff, executive committee members, volunteer leaders, and more to discuss the chapter's response to this outbreak.

While these are certainly challenging times, we are still making progress! Since this outbreak started, Savannah has committed to transitioning to 100% clean energy (see page 6); the last remaining proposed coal plant in the U.S., Plant Washington in Sandersville, GA, is officially cancelled and won't be built (pg. 6); and activists successfully convinced the Army Corps of Engineers to give the public more time to comment on a proposal to mine outside the Okefenokee and hold a virtual public meeting (pg. 8).

Thanks to all who are continuing to do good work!

**GETTING OUTDOORS DURING THE OUTBREAK**

Sierra Club Outings (and other in-person events) have been cancelled through June 14. We know spring is a beautiful time of year to enjoy nature, and we encourage folks who want to get outdoors to do so close to home. Explore the local parks in your neighborhoods and towns, but practice physical distancing and follow CDC guidelines for visiting parks ([bit.ly/CDC-Parks](https://bit.ly/CDC-Parks)). Never trespass in a park or trail that has been closed, and be sure to keep practicing Leave No Trace principals.

From Outings Leader Lee Graham: *"The healing power of nature gives us a positive focus in our times of troubles. Research shows that not getting enough time in nature is detrimental to our mental health. It also reminds us why we are fighting for the natural world. Nature has no voice in our political sphere unless WE advocate for it. Enjoy and advocate!"*

THANK YOU TO OUR

# 2019 DONORS

FOR YOUR **STRONG** SUPPORT

<b>880</b> INDIVIDUALS		<b>9</b> FOUNDATIONS
<b>7</b> LIVE OAK CHAMPION \$10,000 – \$50,000		
<b>28</b> DOGWOOD DEFENDER \$1,000 - \$5,000		
<b>204</b> PINE PROTECTOR \$100 - \$999		
<b>650</b> REDBUD ADVOCATE \$100 OR LESS		

**WE COULDN'T DO OUR WORK WITHOUT YOU**

# Ways to take action today!

Photo credit: Bob Springfield

The spring issue of this magazine normally focuses on ways to get outside. We highlight our outings program with a special emphasis on connecting outings with our conservation campaigns. This issue of the Georgia Sierran is a little different.

The COVID-19 outbreak has affected every part of our lives, and we're all handling it differently. We've heard that some of you are feeling some pent-up energy and have been looking for ways to take action while sheltering at home. Here's a list of suggestions!

## **ATTEND A CLEAN ENERGY COMMITTEE MEETING:**

Our Clean Energy Committee, which works on our Beyond Coal and Ready for 100 campaigns, continues to meet every two weeks. It's a great space and community to get the latest updates on all things clean energy related, and for folks to learn how to get started in organizing for themselves and their communities. The Clean Energy Committee meets via Zoom video conference on the third Wednesday of each month at 5 p.m. More details available on our calendar ([sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar)).

**REGISTER TO VOTE:** Georgia's presidential and general primary elections have been pushed back to June 9. The deadline for voters to be registered for that election is May 11. The Georgia Secretary of State's voter page ([mvp.sos.ga.gov](https://mvp.sos.ga.gov)) has links to register to vote, check your registration, find your polling place, apply for an absentee ballot, view your sample ballot, and more. Visit [sierraclub.org/readytovote](https://sierraclub.org/readytovote) for more information.

**APPLY FOR AN ABSENTEE BALLOT:** With so much uncertainty surrounding Georgia's upcoming election due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage all eligible voters to request an absentee ballot that will allow them to vote in the June 9 election by mail. You can download the absentee ballot request form at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](https://mvp.sos.ga.gov), and most voters should have received a ballot request form through the mail already. All county offices will accept emailed, faxed, or mailed submissions of completed

forms. A clear picture taken by a smartphone is fine as a submission. A resource for looking up contact info for each county can be found at [elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/countyregistrars.do](https://elections.sos.ga.gov/Elections/countyregistrars.do).

**FILL OUT THE CENSUS:** An accurate count of the number of people living in your community has a direct impact on the amount of funding your community receives. It is also immensely consequential to upcoming redistricting processes. The Census only needs to be filled out once per household as it counts every person living at your address. Fill it out and learn more at [my2020census.gov](https://my2020census.gov).

**HELP PROTECT THE OKEFENOKEE:** Twin Pines Minerals, out of Birmingham, Alabama, is asking for a permit to mine across about 900 acres of wetlands just outside the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. This is the company's second attempt to get a permit after withdrawing its request to mine 1,200 acres back in February. The public comment period for this new application was recently extended to May 28. There will also be a public hearing on May 13. Read more on page 8. Go to [bit.ly/okefenokee](https://bit.ly/okefenokee) to send in your comment.

## **TELL THE GEORGIA EPD WE NEED COAL ASH**

**STORED SAFELY:** Georgia Power has filed for permits to begin closing down its 29 coal ash ponds that collectively hold more than a million tons of waste from decades of burning coal. In March, the Georgia EPD issued draft permits for two ponds at Plant Hammond near Rome, both of which will be excavated. Public comment on those draft permits is open through mid-May. To comment on the Plant Hammond draft permits, send an email to [epdcomments@dnr.ga.gov](mailto:epdcomments@dnr.ga.gov) with "Plant Hammond CCR Permit" in the subject line. Tell them you want to see the ash excavated and moved off-site to a dry, lined landfill away from water bodies and low-income communities. The Georgia EPD will be rolling out more of these permits throughout the year. Follow our Georgia Beyond Coal Campaign on Facebook at [facebook.com/GABeyondCoal](https://facebook.com/GABeyondCoal).

# Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day with us!

Show us what the environment means to you in a drawing, poem, or anything else

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, a key date in the history of the environmental movement. The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter typically celebrates with big events, but this year, we've had to celebrate separately at our homes, but still together.

We know folks across Georgia are struggling with dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, and it's tough sometimes to be optimistic about the future. But the Georgia Chapter got a heavy dose of hope in our mailbox just as this outbreak was beginning from Ian Lindsay. Ian wrote to us to ask if we would print his poem in the next issue of our magazine.

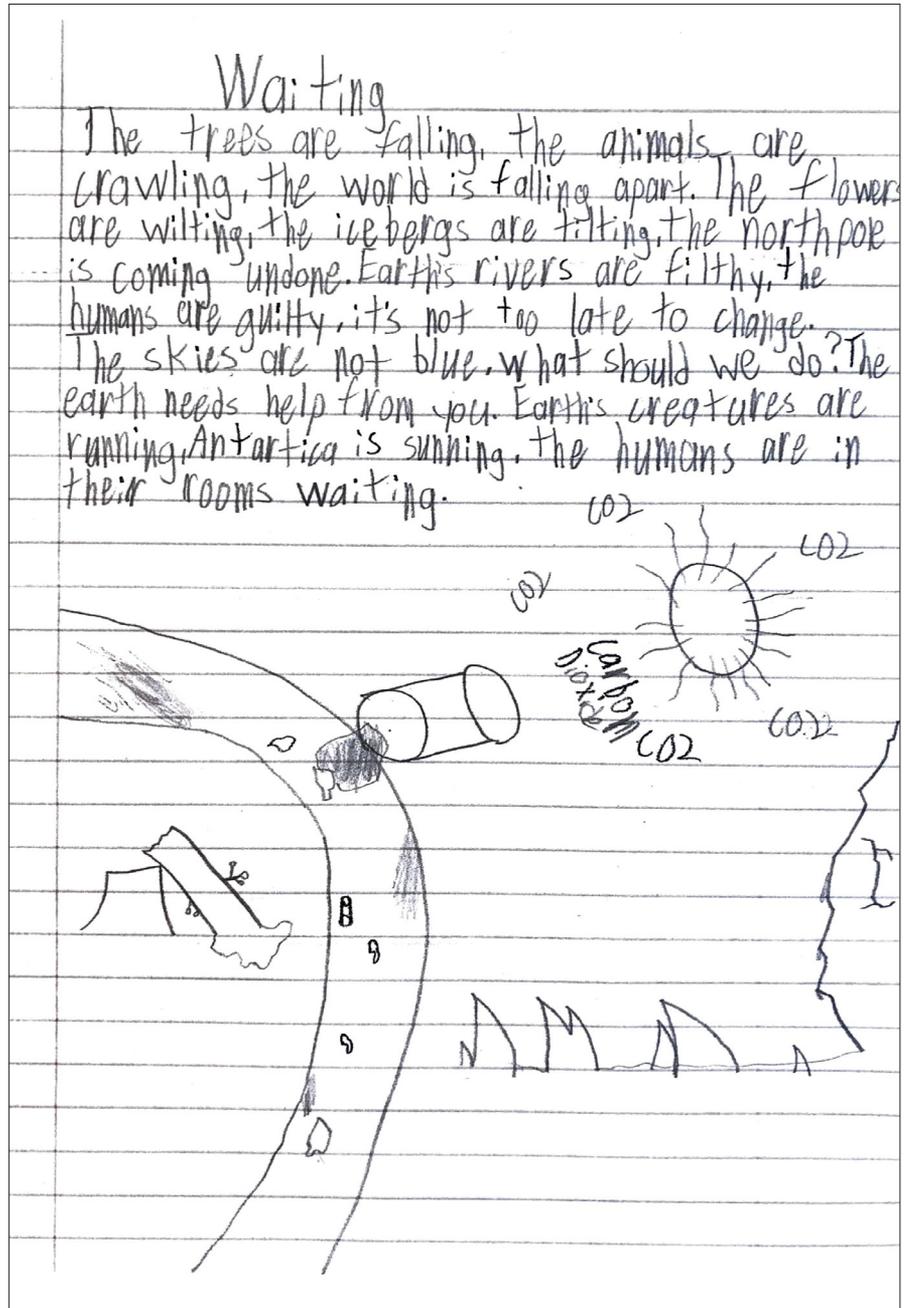
He wrote that he's concerned about pollution, extinction, and global warming, and he wants "more people to realize what is happening to the Earth."

Ian's letter and poem, titled "Waiting," made us feel truly optimistic for the days ahead, and convinced that his generation is poised to make a huge difference in the world.

We know there are many young people like Ian out there, and we want to hear from them!

In honor of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter wants to hear from the young people across the state who will still be fighting for the environment 50 year from now!

We're asking young people to create a drawing, painting, poem, short story, essay, sculpture, or any anything else that shows how they are fulfilling the Sierra Club's mission to enjoy, explore, and protect the environment.



Our favorites will be featured on our website and in the next issue of this magazine!

Send your submissions to [gasierran@gmail.com](mailto:gasierran@gmail.com) with your name, age, and where you're from by June 1 to take part. We can't wait to see your creations!

# End of Plant Washington marks major milestone

STEPHEN STETSON, SENIOR CAMPAIGN REPRESENTATIVE, BEYOND COAL CAMPAIGN

Although the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine have slowed down many elements of the urgent fight for clean energy, our Beyond Coal Campaign has made steady but important progress in the past few months. The public health crisis sweeping the globe is a top priority, but we have continued to push for electricity policy reforms across the state that will protect the long-term safety and prosperity of Georgia residents and our natural world.

The main headline from our recent work is the announcement that the last remaining proposed coal plant in the United States — Plant Washington in Sandersville, Georgia — will never be built. It's always satisfying to see a bad idea fail to come to fruition, and Plant Washington was a bad idea that lingered for many years. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division (EPD) recently announced the denial of the last lingering permit, terminating the project. **The end of Plant Washington means there are no new coal plants planned to be built in the U.S. — a major milestone!**

Plant Washington was originally proposed in 2008 by Power4Georgians, LLC, a consortium of nonprofit electric membership corporations (EMCs). The project's supporters claimed that the 850-megawatt coal-fired power plant was needed to meet their projected growth in electricity demand. Local opposition was swift and immediate, and Sierra Club joined with the Fall Line Alliance for a Clean Environment, Altamaha Riverkeeper, Ogeechee Riverkeeper, and the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy to take a stand against the scheme. Represented by

Southern Environmental Law Center, we drew a line in the sand and said that Georgia did not need another coal plant.

This announcement has particular significance because it represents the end of a national "rush to coal" that began almost two decades ago when a massive number of new coal plants were proposed, giving rise to the Beyond Coal Campaign. Sierra Club created a wave a national opposition to the new coal plants, and then began targeting the nation's existing coal fleet. Over the years, the prices for renewable energy began to plummet, and the economics for coal began to worsen — both trends that continue to this day.

Although Georgia remains home to three large coal plants (Plants Bowen, Wansley, and Scherer), their days are numbered, too. And the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, and especially residents of Washington County, can take a moment to appreciate that the last looming shadow of a new coal plant has been successfully removed.

In other Beyond Coal news, our appeal of Georgia Power's rate case remains pending in the Georgia judiciary as things have slowed down for the viral pandemic. When the Georgia Public Service Commission made a decision in the rate case at the end of 2019, our members and attorneys were not pleased that Georgia Power was given permission to collect its massive expenses from cleaning up coal ash pollution from customers, especially because the cleanup plans lacked details and official legal permission.

In coming weeks and months, Sierra Club will be litigating the question of who pays for coal ash cleanup, but also engaging with the draft permits that are going to be issued that outline how each of the coal ash basins at the power plants around the state will be cleaned up. With something as toxic as coal ash and the risks of contaminating our beloved lakes, rivers, and groundwater, we're going to stay on the front lines of the struggle to get every ounce of that poisonous residue into a proper storage site.

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READY FOR 100

# Savannah commits to 100 percent clean energy!

JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION FELLOW, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

Savannah is the latest city to pass a resolution committing to 100% clean and renewable energy! Advocacy for this resolution was championed by Harambe House, an environmental justice organization located in Savannah, that partnered with local faith-based institutions, retailers and

restaurants, sustainability and environmental groups, as well as climate advocates.

Despite the COVID-19 global pandemic, Savannah's City Council unanimously passed the resolution during a teleconference call on March 26. Mildred McClain, executive director at the Harambe House, recently told the AJC that "the coronavirus is reminding us that the most vulnerable among us hurt the most when disaster strikes. This new approach to energy means we can combat climate change and work to redress historical inequities in our community that have hurt frontline and fenceline neighborhoods for decades."

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

The resolution passed in Savannah is strong and sets benchmark goals, such as 30% clean energy by 2025, 50% by 2030, and 100% by 2035. Savannah's 100% resolution also bakes in equity and accountability, two of the most important factors that these resolutions should address. Coastal cities like Savannah will be on the front lines when it comes to the impact of climate change, and passing a 100% resolution prepares the city by localizing energy production and making it more resilient.

Savannah is the fifth city in Georgia to approve a 100 percent clean energy resolution, joining Atlanta, Athens, Augusta, and Clarkston.

Next up is the city of Decatur: Local residents and advocates there are pushing the city to prioritize a just and equitable transition to 100% clean, renewable energy as a part of Decatur's 2030 Strategic Planning Process. Clean energy champions have been attending citizen roundtable discussions to push for that clean energy transition amongst conversations of diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice for the future of Decatur.

Decatur residents have been working since 2019 urge the city to commit to a 100 percent clean energy resolution, but they need your help! A petition has been started to tell the City Commission setting a goal of 100% clean renewable energy by 2030 is a top priority. Our petition is for Decatur residents, workers, those who attend



Image credit: A. Hofmeister

school in Decatur, its shoppers and diners, or anyone who has any type of relationship to Decatur. It's time we think global and act local on our energy, Decatur! Please sign and share with neighbors at [decatur100.com](http://decatur100.com).

Meanwhile, there is a new Solarize campaign underway in Decatur and DeKalb County that will bring more solar capacity to the area. Solarize campaigns work by bringing rings neighbors together to save money on new solar panels and other clean energy technologies by buying together in bulk. Visit [solarizedecatur-dekalb.com](http://solarizedecatur-dekalb.com) to learn more.

LEGISLATIVE

## Georgia Legislative session suspended due to COVID-19

MARK WOODALL, CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Due to the coronavirus, the Georgia General Assembly suspended the session on Friday, March 13, after completing 29 days of the 40-day calendar. When the Legislature returns, the Sierra Club will be pushing to pass meaningful coal ash legislation in the Senate. Killing H.B. 545 in the Senate will also be a top priority. H.B. 545 weakens the private property rights for all people living near massive lagoons of hog or cow manure or industrial poultry operations.

The Georgia House passed numerous good environmental bills on Crossover Day, March 12, including bills on ethylene oxide release reporting, three coal ash bills, and a railroad tie burning ban bill. H.R. 164 passed on Day 27. This constitutional amendment is a long-time priority of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter. If the amendment passes in

November, the Legislature will be able to create and abolish fee-based programs with the funds dedicated to the use intended. This could finally be a fix for the millions of dollars diverted from tire and hazardous waste clean up programs.

Thanks to Ricky Leroux, communications coordinator for the Chapter, for the major improvements of the legislative issue page on the Chapter website and for e-alerts. Please go to the Legislative issue page on the Chapter website ([sierraclub.org/georgia/legislative](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/legislative)) to sign up for the legislative campaigns. When the Legislature returns, they may meet for 11 consecutive days to get done quickly, so please watch for alerts and updates. Constituents contacting their legislators is vital to success.

There were several important environmental bills that failed to pass by Crossover Day, including a 100% clean electricity bill, a constitutional amendment to free the motor fuel tax for transit, the electric vehicle tax credit bills, bills to stop the Vogtle charge on schools, the bills to ban single use plastic bags, and the bills to require bottom liners for coal ash storage. Those campaigns will continue in future sessions.

## Transit in uncertain times

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

Transit is an essential service. There are so many people around Georgia who still need a way to get to work, go shopping, or visit friends or family in need of care, and trains and buses are how they get around. Riding transit is not a large risk for infection. Rather, it is the places the buses and trains take you that could be risky (e.g., crowded grocery stores). It is still best to avoid going out if at all possible, wash your hands thoroughly and often, and thank your driver if you do need to board a bus.

Transit operators around metro Atlanta are continuing service, but all on reduced schedules and frequencies due to a drop in ridership and tax revenue. MARTA has seen an over 70% drop in train ridership and 60% drop in bus ridership. Other operators have more drastic declines. In normal times, the trains and busses have about the same ridership, so a smaller drop in bus ridership helps prove the necessity of proper bus service.

These transit operators have taken a hard financial hit as social distancing has slowed the economy, and all are losing millions of dollars each week from the drop in ridership and local taxes. The latest COVID-19 relief bill from Congress, the CARES Act, is providing \$25 billion for transit operators around the

country to help fill these financial gaps. \$370 million will go towards operators in the Atlanta region, \$65 million to transit in 14 smaller metropolitan areas in the state, and \$75 million for rural transit around Georgia. This money will primarily be used to help pay drivers and staff who are essential employees.

In more normal times, the Georgia General Assembly would be done with its annual session by now, but it has gone on a long recess due to the pandemic. The main bills we will be watching whenever it comes back are H.B. 105, which raises money for transit by adding a 25-cent fee on every rideshare trip, and H.B. 511, which moves the ATL Authority under the Georgia Department of Transportation's jurisdiction. H.B. 105 has the potential to raise up to \$40 million per year. H.B. 511 was originally a much more ambitious bill that created a new statewide agency to coordinate and fund rural transit, but it is now a bill to help GDOT consolidate its power. In greener times, a single agency managing all transportation in the state would be ideal to streamline various processes, but GDOT is traditionally anti-transit. We will also be watching H.R. 50, which would create a study committee to consider a high-speed rail line linking Atlanta and Savannah.

It's difficult to organize and advocate when we are trying to social distance, but there is an important thing we all can do to help improve transit: Fill out the annual Census at [my2020census.gov](https://my2020census.gov). You can use the Census ID you received in the mail, or look up your address in the system. Census population data helps decide where federal transit dollars go, and Georgia should not lose out on that.

## Okefenokee mining permit comment period extended

RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,  
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The public comment period for a proposed mining operation just outside the Okefenokee has been extended to May 28! The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is making the decision on the permit, also held an online public meeting about the proposal on May 13.

Twin Pines Minerals, out of Birmingham, Alabama, originally filed for a permit to mine 1,200 acres back in July 2019, but abruptly withdrew its application in February. The company filed for a new permit, this

time to mine about 900 acres, in mid-March.

The comment period for that new permit was set to end on April 13, but the Corps of Engineers agreed to extend the deadline more than six weeks to May 28.

As of mid-April, more than 30,000 comments have been submitted to the Corps on this project, but we need your help to keep the pressure on. Go to [bit.ly/okefenokee](https://bit.ly/okefenokee) to send your comment to the Corps. Ask the Corps to require a full environmental impact statement (EIS) be conducted for this project. A project that has the potential to totally alter a unique and delicate ecosystem like the Okefenokee must be seriously scrutinized, and an impartial EIS would help determine the possible effects of a mine like this.

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

# SPRING 2020 GROUP NEWS

## CENTENNIAL GROUP

SERVING COBB, CHEROKEE & NORTH FULTON

**BY BETTYE HARRIS**, CENTENNIAL GROUP DELEGATE TO CHAPTER EXCOM, & **LYNN WALSTON**, CHAIR, CENTENNIAL GROUP

### BE WELL - BE SAFE - LET US KNOW HOW YOU ARE DOING

As with other groups, we have cancelled in-person meetings, outings, and activities until further notice in response to the COVID-19 emergency. We miss seeing you, we appreciate your patience and support, and we welcome your comments and questions.

Yes, we're learning to use Zoom and other meeting tools. We've joined recent conversations about crisis coping and supporting each other. We seek additional ways to address our priority issues (Centennial Group issues include transit, parks/greenspace, elections, equity/outreach, and membership).

We intend to schedule and promote one or more virtual Centennial Group meetings or socials this spring. Please join us, assist us if you can, and take good care of yourself. Thanks to Centennial folks who have volunteered for phone banks, interviewing candidates, making/donating masks, picking up trash while walking, checking on other members and friends, completing your Census form, and requesting an absentee ballot.

### ROGER'S BACKYARD

Centennial member Roger Buerki says that his



fabulous backyard collection of "native plants" (including wild geranium, native azalea, vinca, mountain laurel, foam flower, hepatica, trillium and dozens more) is once again in brilliant bloom.

He invites anyone to pay a solo and "socially distant & responsible" backyard visit to view. Bring your wildflower book!

### BEGINNING-OF-YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

Not so long ago, we enjoyed a very busy and memorable 1st quarter of meetings, outings and activities including:

- Jan 9th - Facilitator Beth Reemes presented "Hope, The Great Turning: Sacred Activism" ([earthspiritaction.com](http://earthspiritaction.com))
- Jan 20th - Cobb Branch NAACP MLK celebration.
- Feb 6th - Neill Herring and Mark Woodall with annual legislative update

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE



The Centennial Group took part in the Cobb Branch NAACP Black History Open House in February.



Centennial Group members pose for a photo while touring the sustainably designed living Kendeda Building at Georgia Tech. To see more photos, visit [bit.ly/Spring2020CentGroup](http://bit.ly/Spring2020CentGroup).

- Feb Saturdays - Cobb Branch NAACP Black History Open Houses
- Feb 15th - Hike from Amicalola Falls to Hike Inn
- Feb 23rd - "Transit Makes Us Happy Hour" hosted by Cobb-4-Transit team.
- Mar 5th - Speakers Jesse Demonbreun-Chapman (Coosa River Basin Initiative); Wan Smith (Cobb EMC Equity Hub); Mike Kahle (Cobb Water Stewardship)

- Mar 12th - Walking/educational tour of living, sustainable Kendeda Building at GA Tech.

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## GROUP INFORMATION

**Website:** [sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial)  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club](https://facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club)

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## GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

**BY DAN FRIEDMAN, CHAIR, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP**

Gwinnett, like every other county, has been challenged by COVID-19. As of April 16, Gwinnett has suffered 917 cases and 32 deaths. Statewide, more than 63,000 Georgians have been tested and nearly a quarter of those have returned positive, indicating that the worse may be yet to come.

These numbers emphasize the need to shelter in place, and our group is staying involved while working from home. Our ExCom meeting was held via Zoom and we are working on ways to conduct our Group meeting with Zoom as well.

Externally, our members are working on issues such as transit expansion in Gwinnett where we are providing information on the decision to place the referendum on the ballot and when the vote should take place.

We're advising members that even though there is a shelter in place order in effect, walking in a park is permitted and reminding people to take precautions by keeping six feet between themselves and others.

We're also providing legislative updates to our membership.

While each of our members have their own stories about how the COVID-19 has affected them, I would like to share one story of how two of our members were not affected by the lack of toilet paper availability as they invested in a bidet attachment for their toilet. Not only have they saved money on toilet paper, they have spared themselves the trauma of running out of toilet paper.

The long term impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak are not known, but there are predictions that this malady, like the flu, could be a seasonal issue, quieting down in warmer months and becoming more active in the fall and winter. If this happens, the skills we are developing will be used and further developed to continue to involve our members in issues that affect their lives and their communities.

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## GROUP INFORMATION

**Website:** [sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett)

## LAGRANGE GROUP

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

BY MARY LOU DABBS, CO-CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP

The LaGrange Group had a couple of good meetings and a couple of fun outings before we had to hunker down into social distancing land. Our January program had us all wanting to start a road trip after we were educated in the art of converting a vehicle (in this case, a day care van) into a live-in residence. Janet Westervelt shared her adventures travelling across the country visiting National Parks and more and showed us the creative techniques she used to make efficient use of her living space. We even got to tour the van!

In February, we were updated on state environmental legislation by the knowledgeable Mark Woodall, and the current state of the Beyond Coal Campaign by Neil Sardana. Their presentations motivated us to become more active participants. Three of our members travelled to Atlanta to take part in Capitol Conservation Day making their positions known to our state legislators, while others made calls from home.

We had one hiking outing along the banks of the



LaGrange Group members took part in Capitol Conservation Day in February.

Chattahoochee River in West Point, and several of us participated in an ad hoc lake clean-up hosted by our local Chattahoochee Riverkeeper one evening at Pyne Road Park.

Now as we wait out these times of cancelled meetings and isolation, the only activities that have continued, while maintaining careful social distance, are work in our butterfly garden, and monitoring of our bluebird boxes.

So as we wait out these strange times, those of us who can get out into nature safely are even more grateful



Laura and Judy check the LaGrange Group's bluebird boxes.

for the role of the Sierra Club in helping to protect our outdoor spaces, and for the peace and comfort that we can enjoy by being in them.

Stay safe and be well.

## GROUP INFORMATION

Website: [sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange)

Facebook: [facebook.com/groups/300840033370271](https://facebook.com/groups/300840033370271)

## METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

### COVID-19 AND OUR COMMUNITY

This time of year in Atlanta usually brings Earth Day marches and events, springtime hikes and picnics, and warm-weather festivities. Months ago, ramping up to the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day, we were calling on our members and volunteers to join in and support climate strikes in April.

The COVID-19 emergency has thrown a wrench into so many of our lives, with widely varying degrees of severity. The in-person gatherings that are typically a foundational tool of organizing, advocacy, and education are not advisable for the time being.

So, what can we do?

**1. Protect yourself and others.** Practicing preventative measures (including social distancing and thorough handwashing) can help us not only protect ourselves from illness, but also protect people at higher risk of

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severe illness, in addition to reducing the impact of the pandemic on our communities.

**2. Care for one another.** This is an important time to get involved, if and however you may be able, to support one another. Check out this Georgia Sierra Club page ([sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates)) for some community support and mutual aid resources to use, share, and contribute to.

To highlight a few examples of mutual aid and other forms of community support in and around Atlanta:

- Food4Life ([atlantasurvival.org](https://atlantasurvival.org)) is a free grocery distribution program now accepting requests, volunteers, and donations.
- Concrete Jungle ([concrete-jungle.org](https://concrete-jungle.org)) is delivering free groceries in partnership with several food pantries and also needs volunteers and donations to do this work.
- Hands On Atlanta is continuing to post volunteer opportunities (in-person and remote) on their Facebook page ([facebook.com/handsonatlanta](https://facebook.com/handsonatlanta)).

We have also been keeping in mind how this emergency ties in to caring for one another in the long term. Why bail out dirty energy industries in the name of shoring up the economy, when we could instead be investing in programs and services that would support health for all of us, ranging from emergency health care now to sustainable agriculture in the long term? And with the current pandemic straining our health care and other systems now, we can expect the effects of the climate crisis on health to make things even tougher unless we can make some big changes.

**3. Sierra Club work is continuing at the national level, in Georgia Sierra Club committees, and in our group.** All Sierra Club in-person events have been put on hold, but many meetings will still go on online or over the phone. If you are interested, please find out how to get involved in activism and advocacy through Georgia Sierra Club committees to protect the planet for all ([sierraclub.org/georgia/conservation](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/conservation)).

Many campaigns include ways to take action online or by phone. For example, with internet access, you can take part in the effort to protect the Okefenokee Swamp from destruction by a proposed mining operation. Learn more about this Georgia Sierra Club campaign and submit your public comment at [bit.ly/okefenokee](https://bit.ly/okefenokee).

**4. Stay in touch and engaged.** Although large gatherings are on hold for now, there's no shortage of great events that will now be held online. We'll continue to share these on our webpage ([sierraclub.org/georgia/](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/)

[atlanta](https://atlanta)) and Facebook page ([facebook.com/sierra-clubATL](https://facebook.com/sierra-clubATL)) when we find out about events.

Speaking of staying in touch: In an effort to keep our community connected at a time of shelter-in-place measures, we have begun an effort to call or text all members and volunteers who have come to our group meetings within the last few months. This group check-in is a small way for us to offer a social greeting, see how our group members are doing on a personal level, find out how we may be able to help each other, and discuss opportunities to get involved with environmental activism and other meaningful work.

Another way to stay engaged: Please note that the Georgia Presidential Primary, General Primary, and local special elections have been postponed to June 9, 2020. Absentee ballot applications are being sent in the mail. If you have already voted, your vote should be counted. If you have not voted yet, your March 24 ballot items (presidential primary and any local special elections) will be given to you when you vote in the June 9 election, alongside ballot items that were planned for the original General Primary in May.

**5. Get outside if and where you can!** Currently, Sierra Club outings are on hold. But now is still a good time to explore nearby parks or just stroll down a quiet street, as long as you are also taking preventative measures to protect yourself and everyone else (See #1), and respecting shelter-in-place orders that have been made in your area. Some places are quieter than usual, the springtime birdsongs standing out more.

## RECENT GROUP MEETINGS

**Jan. 14:** Our featured speaker in January was Stephen Ramsden, a wildlife photographer and founder of the Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project. At the meeting, Stephen led us through a quick history of the universe to provide context for explanations of how light behaves, how we see color, and how birds and other animals have evolved to use light through their displays of color. In an accompaniment to this presentation, Stephen then led us on a bird walk at Clyde Shepherd Nature Preserve, where he serves on the board. There, we spotted several of the nearly 170 bird species recorded at the preserve in their natural habitat.

**Feb. 11:** Our Georgia Sierra Club lobbyist Neill Herring and volunteer lobbyist Mark Woodall provided a lively and informative rundown of bills that were moving through the Georgia General Assembly (our state legislature) that could either help or hinder our work to protect our environment for all. Check out the new Georgia Sierra Club bill tracker ([sierraclub.org/](https://sierraclub.org/)

**georgia/legislative**) for information on key bills during the state legislative session. Although the session was suspended in mid-March because of the COVID-19 emergency, at least some of the bills will still be in play when the session resumes.

**Mar. 10:** Georgia Sierra Club communications coordinator Ricky Leroux delivered a well-rounded and informative presentation on the threat that mining poses to the Okefenokee Swamp. Considered an icon of the Southeast, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is one of the largest intact freshwater ecosystems in the country. After significant public outcry last year over its initial application to mine across 1,200 acres, mining company Twin Pines Minerals has refiled its application to mine for heavy minerals just a few miles from the swamp. The mining operation Twin Pines has proposed could permanently alter the swamp, impact the St. Marys River and other watersheds, and affect endangered and threatened species. We have until May 28 to submit public comments against the new proposal.

Learn more and submit your comment at [bit.ly/okefenokee](https://bit.ly/okefenokee).

**CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS, STAY UP TO DATE**

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](mailto:nddutton@gmail.com).

If you don't get our monthly meeting announcements, sign up for email updates through the Georgia Chapter website ([sierraclub.org/georgia](https://sierraclub.org/georgia)) and be sure to include your Atlanta-area zipcode.

**GROUP INFORMATION**

**Website:** [sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta)  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/groups/SierraClubATL](https://facebook.com/groups/SierraClubATL)

**SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP**

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

**BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP**

We're pleased to announce the following awards were given at SRG's last monthly meeting:

**The Savannah River Group Member Award to Jeff Landis.** Jeff has been involved in every activity that SRG has done for the last couple of years, that included getting certified as an outings leader and consistently taking the lead or being the sweep in most outings, participating in tabling events, letter writing, newsletter labeling, and the list goes on.



**JEFF LANDIS**



**DALE REDDICK**

**The Sierra Club Membership to Dale Reddick.** Dale has supported our Adopt-a-Stream program and participated in our water quality monitoring events for all ten sites. For his efforts we made him "one of us."



**LINDA MCBURNEY**

**EXCOM member to Linda**

**McBurney.** Linda has been a SRG EXCOM member for the past six years and is currently a Co-Chair, Group Delegate to Chapter and an Adopt-a-Stream monitor.

Our new Outreach Coordinator is Ann Sutherland. Her responsibilities include promoting volunteer opportunities, coordinating outreach events, activities and speakers, and assisting leadership with increasing the visibility of the Sierra Club in the community and cultivating relationships with local organizations.

Our activist work includes conducting a Lobby Your Legislator training for members and the general public and initiating letter writing events each month that start one hour before our monthly programs. We provide fact sheets on current issues, the names and addresses of legislators, and the stationery and stamps to mail the participants' letters. We have been averaging 25 letters at each meeting.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our physical gatherings we have held a SRG EXCOM meeting using Zoom and have tentative plans for a June monthly meeting and outings. We continue to inform members and friends about issues through our social media.

**GROUP INFORMATION**

**Website:** [sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River)

# SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER DIRECTORY

## LOCAL GROUP CONTACTS

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

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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### Vice Chair - Administration

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### Legal Chair

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### Coastal Group Delegate

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### Membership Chair: Vacant

### Outings Chair: Vacant

### Political Chair

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## CHAPTER OFFICE

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PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID

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Change service requested



### **VISIT US ONLINE**

Check out our website ([sierraclub.org/georgia](http://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](http://gasierraclub.smugmug.com)