

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • APRIL / MAY / JUNE 2021



EARTH DAY 2021

INSIDE: MEET OUR NEW CHAPTER CHAIR • THE GEORGIA CHAPTER'S NEW COAL ASH DOCUMENTARY
2021 LEGISLATIVE RECAP • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS AND MORE!

AT THE TRAILHEAD

Our leadership team is proud to share some exciting news with you!

Daniel Blackman has been appointed the new chair of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Executive Committee! Blackman, a political leader and environmental justice advocate, will fill the remainder of former chair Jeff Schoenberg's term on the executive committee (ExCom), which expires at the end of 2021.

Daniel is an alumnus of Clark Atlanta University, served as the Senior Vice President for Environmental Affairs and Sustainability at Capital Fortitude Business Advisors, and recently ran for a seat on the Georgia Public Service Commission, falling short in Georgia's historic runoff election this past January. He has been a guest lecturer at colleges and universities across the U.S. and has served as an advisor to the Congressional Black Caucus on environmental justice issues and on the board of the ACLU of Georgia.



DANIEL BLACKMAN

"I am honored to serve as Executive Committee Chair of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter," said Blackman. "My commitment to this position is rooted in our opportunity to mitigate the impact climate change has had on Georgia's economy. It is time to reassess the social cost of carbon and encourage statewide climate policies that benefit all Georgians in the long run. We must also recommit ourselves to environmental justice and intergenerational equity, if we truly believe in leaving our children a better planet than they inherited."



JUMANA MASTER

Additionally, Jumana Master has been appointed as Chapter Vice Chair of Administration. Jumana has been co-chair for Partnership for Southern Equity's Just Energy Circle Policy Committee, a certified Climate Reality Leader, a nuclear harm reduction strategist with GA WAND Education Fund, a program manager on global environment, sustainability, and compliance with Delta Air Lines, and an account executive with Corporate Reports, Inc.



MARIE NEFF

We are also pleased that Marie Neff, long-time volunteer chapter leader and our previous Chapter Human Resources Chair, has been appointed as Chapter ExCom Secretary.

Because ExCom members are typically elected by our Chapter members (except in the case of a vacancy, like we have here), we wanted to share some info with our members about how we got to this point:

Our former chair, Jeff Schoenberg, announced he would be stepping

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On the Cover

Photo: The sun sets on Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia.

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down from ExCom earlier this year. A committee that included ExCom members and other Chapter leaders came together to search for a new chair and candidates for other vacancies. This committee presented their nominations to the full Executive Committee at

its March meeting, and all were unanimously approved.

The Georgia Chapter is proud to welcome all three of these outstanding volunteers to their new roles on our ExCom leadership team!

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CHAPTER NEWS

UPDATES ON OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

We hope this issue finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. It's hard to believe, but it's now been more than a year since all in-person events were put on hold and Georgia Chapter staff began working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thankfully, all Georgians 16 and older are now eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. To find a vaccine appointment near you, go to vaccinefinder.org or dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine.

While we wait for more vaccinations, please continue to take precautions to protect yourself, your family, and your community: wear a mask in public places, practice physical distancing, wash your hands frequently and thoroughly, and stay home as much as possible.

Chapter staff members continue to work from home and will do so through at least the first half of 2021. The Chapter office in Decatur remains closed, our events and meetings are being held virtually, and all outings are on hold until further notice.

For the latest on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and links to many available community resources, visit sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates. And be sure to check our calendar at sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar for all our upcoming virtual events.

NATIONAL SIERRA CLUB ELECTIONS ARE UNDERWAY

Those eligible to vote in the national Sierra Club election should have received your national Sierra Club ballot in early March 2021 by mail (or by email if you chose the electronic delivery option). This includes information on candidates and where you can find additional

information on Sierra Club's website.

The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels and requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well. Yearly participation in elections at all Sierra Club levels is a right of membership and your voice matters.

In a typical year less than 10% of eligible members vote in the Board elections. A minimum of 5% is required for the elections to be valid. Our grassroots structure is strengthened when our participation is high. That means your participation is needed in the voting process.

Each candidate provides a statement about themselves and their views on the official election ballot. You can learn more by asking questions of your group and chapter leadership and other experienced members. Also, go to sierraclub.org/board-directors-election-2021 to visit the Sierra Club's election website for additional information about candidates.

Voting online is quick and easy! Even if you receive your election materials in the mail, we encourage you to use the user-friendly online voting site to save time and postage. If sending via ground mail, please note: your ballots must be received by no later than noon Eastern time on Election Day, April 28, 2021.

UPDATES FROM THE EQUITY COMMITTEE

Building off the theme of Earth Day and attempting to expressly name the ways in which all of our work moves forward the ultimate goals of fighting climate change, the Equity Committee has gathered a collection of quotes that reflect the interconnected nature of equity and climate justice. Keep an eye out for these blue boxes (the first example is below) throughout the issue for quotes we love and hope you will too.

// Allow for the innovation and solutions to come from the communities that designed them.
EQUITY BEGINS WITH DESIGN.

//

Rue Mapp, Founder & CEO, Outdoor Afro

Earth Week of Action – Get Involved!

This story originally ran on the Sierra Club's website at sierraclub.org/articles/2021/04/earth-week-action.

BY MARTÍN WITCHGER, SENIOR ONLINE ORGANIZER FOR FEDERAL RESISTANCE AT THE SIERRA CLUB

This year's Earth Day comes as we continue to endure a devastating pandemic and an exhausting year. We participated in uprisings for racial justice, and continue to call for justice and equity for all. We turned out in record numbers to elect leaders who have begun to tackle today's health, economic, and climate crises.

With new leaders in office, now is the time to push for bold, transformative legislation that will plant these seeds for a better future. And this month — Earth Month — is a great time to (re)commit to taking action for a more livable planet for all.

Starting Earth Day, April 22, we'll be embarking on 10 days of action to create a world where everyone can thrive. We hope you'll join us, along with your friends and family!

Text EARTH DAY to the number 69866 to get text updates on our



Earth Week of Action to ensure you don't miss any of the events!

During the 10 days, we'll be discussing issues like:

- Fighting for a democracy that represents all of us—especially how we can protect the voting rights of the Black and Brown communities that are under attack from GOP legislatures backed by big polluters
- Pushing for the THRIVE Act—an economic recovery plan that will create 15 million good jobs while centering climate and racial justice
- Ensuring clean energy and transportation is accessible to all

- Stopping dirty tar sands pipelines like Line 3 and Dakota Access from ripping through Native lands
- Protecting our lands and waters so they can be part of the climate solution.
- And so much more!

It'll be 10 packed days of interactive and fun live events, powerful stories, and opportunities to create safe, healthy, and sustainable communities throughout the country and the world. Sign up to get daily text updates for the Earth Week of Action: **Text the words EARTH DAY to 69866.**

Thanks for being a part of it, and for inviting others to join us.

(Virtually) celebrate Earth Day with us!

Join us for a special Earth Day event, a screening of "Rising from the Ashes," a coal ash documentary series about the dangers of coal ash in Georgia!

The screening of this three-part series will conclude with Q & A featuring the film makers, those in the film, and staff from the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign.

The event takes place **Wednesday, April 21st, 5-6:30 p.m.**

RSVP at bit.ly/GASC-EarthDay. See you then!

A green-themed poster for the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Earth Day (eve) Celebration. It features the Sierra Club logo, a map of Georgia with the text "#NO MORE COAL", and a cartoon character hugging a globe. The text includes the event title, description, date and time, and RSVP link.

Earth Day (eve) Celebration!

Join us for a screening of "Rising From the Ashes," our new documentary on coal ash in Georgia!

**Wednesday April 21st
5 to 6:30 PM**

RSVP: bit.ly/GASC-EarthDay

Betting big on batteries in Georgia

The story below was adapted from an interview of former Sierra Club Georgia Chapter ExCom member Seth Gunning by Judith Lewis Mernit. It is written in first-person from Seth's perspective. The story originally ran in Sierra Magazine, the national magazine of the Sierra Club.

When you're organizing for change, an important principle is that you should always be trying to organize yourself out of a position. During my time as a Beyond Coal organizer with the Sierra Club in Georgia, we got my utility company, Cobb Electric Membership Corporation, to cancel plans to build two new coal-fired power plants. We worked to elect new leadership to the cooperative and turn the utility into a solar energy leader. After that, I realized it was time to move on.

Since then, Cobb Electric has become a trailblazer in the adoption of renewable energy. The company I work for, Creative Solar, of Kennesaw, Georgia, built one of the largest solar and battery storage systems in the state on Cobb's campus.

I didn't have a super smooth transition to the private sector. I took some time deciding what I was going to do. I hiked the Appalachian

Trail—well, about half the Appalachian Trail—before I came back to Atlanta. Then I started having conversations with solar-company owners. Even though I had no business experience whatsoever, I had worked with these folks, helping to advocate for solar and build the market. I told them, "I want to start on the roof. I want to learn the business from the ground up—or the roof down."

It wasn't easy in the hot Georgia summers or the frigid winters—you could barely feel your hands sometimes. But it was rewarding. Growing up, I spent most of my summers with my grandfather, who ran a furniture business in southwest Virginia. I learned from all that time I spent plugging screw holes and cutting the same little design a hundred times. So I had the skills to excel at installation, to take pride in a high level of workmanship.

I'm now a salesperson and manage our sales team. The company is 13 years old, and I've been here for almost five. Now we have 15 installers doing several hundred projects a year—everything from four-kilowatt systems on homes to four-megawatt systems on commercial buildings.

The Georgia solar business is



Seth Gunning, sales director at Creative Solar USA | Illustration by Joe Morse

different than in, say, California or Minnesota. Until recently, Georgia utilities weren't required to offer net metering, where the utility gives you credit for the excess electricity your solar array puts on the grid during the day. That's why we install so many batteries: Without them, you could only offset maybe 35 percent of your electricity consumption and only during daylight hours. To offset more than that—say, 85 percent of your electricity consumption—you have to couple it with energy storage.

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// When we say 'I CAN'T BREATHE' — whether it is an officer with a knee on our neck or the pollution which continues to take away our breath — that's why we march and that's why we work so hard to CHANGE THESE DYNAMICS.

Mustafa Santiago Ali, Vice President of Environmental Justice, Climate, and Community Revitalization for the National Wildlife Federation

//

Batteries really opened up the solar market in Georgia. We install a lot of Tesla Powerwalls, which are the most popular and actually one of the more affordable options. If Tesla has done any good in the solar industry, it's popularizing the benefits of battery storage so folks in states like ours can get the full value of the solar energy they're producing on the roof.

In January 2020, Georgia's largest utility, Georgia Power, started offering limited net metering to its customers. But we're finding that people still want batteries for resiliency, to get through disasters. Hurricane Zeta came through in Oc-

tober and cut off power for a week and a half, two weeks.

And as people started working from home more because of COVID, they got to be more sensitive to even small power outages that interrupt important Zoom calls. It's also important for hospitals and doctors' offices that need to keep vaccines at super cold temperatures.

I tend not to really talk about climate that much to our clients. People are looking at solar to save money on their utility bills. But there have been times when, you know, in the southern part of the state, working with people in

agriculture especially, the topic comes up.

These are folks that, by the looks of them, you would not expect to be concerned about climate. But when we start the conversation, they'll share that they're also interested in solar because they've got kids and grandkids, and they're concerned about what the future is going to look like for them. They want to pass their businesses on, and they want to make sure the world is going to be stable enough to do that.

Judith Lewis Mernit is a frequent contributor to Sierra. She lives in Venice, California.

NEWS - GEORGIA CHAPTER'S NEW CLIMATE CAMPAIGN

New Campaign to #ActOnClimate & #BuildBackBetter

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

You might notice some of our work focusing on federal level action and elected official targeting. This is because of a new (to us!) campaign the Georgia Chapter is undertaking, the Climate Action Campaign. The Climate Action Campaign is a national multi organizational movement of climate advocates holding our elected representatives in Congress accountable to take action on climate change and energy. Here in Georgia, the work will focus on what policy implications we will see impacting our state and local work.

We are partnering with Georgia Interfaith Power and Light as well as Mom's Clean Air Force to target:

- Rep. Nikema Williams
- Rep. Lucy McBath
- Rep. Carolyn Bourdeaux
- Sen. Jon Ossoff
- Sen. Raphael Warnock
- The Biden Administration

Our ask of the targets is to support policy and legislation under Biden's Build Back Better plan geared towards climate justice, 100% clean energy economy, clean green job growth, transit expansion and EV infrastructure, and conservation efforts to support the movement.

Some of our key moments for organizing with the



Climate Action Campaign this spring include confirming a pro climate cabinet, Biden's joint address to congress, and Earth Day.

This Earth Day, Joe Biden and United States leaders will convene a climate summit for leaders of major economies to double down on climate change mitigation. This is a perfect opportunity to celebrate the win of rejoining the Paris Climate Accord and ask for more aggressive environmental action.

Are you interested in getting involved? We are looking for grassroots actions among Sierra Club Georgia Chapter members and supporters to engage in public events, participate in letter writing, attend office visits, and lean into relationships with elected officials with us. I am looking for volunteers who would be willing to advocate for our policy priorities. Sign up to take part in federally targeted climate action at bit.ly/cacga.

Rising from the Ashes: Our new documentary about coal ash

BY EMILY BOSCH, ASSOCIATE PRESS SECRETARY, BEYOND COAL CAMPAIGN, SOUTHEAST

How we handle coal ash this year will have impacts for generations to come, which is why the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter and Beyond Coal Campaign have teamed up with Solis Films to produce a three-part documentary series explaining the Georgia coal ash problem and what we can do to stop it.

The documentary series is called "Rising from the Ashes," and its three chapters were released in March and April.

Dink NeSmith, Chairman of the Press-Sentinel in Jesup, is featured in the documentary and summarizes Georgia's current watershed moment: "We owe it to future generations to invest whatever it takes that we aren't passing on to our great great grandchildren a problem that we could have handled more responsibly in 2021."

This year, the Georgia EPD will be making critical decisions about how coal ash is stored in Georgia. We must advocate for this toxic waste to be stored safely.

Go to GeorgiaCoalAsh.org to watch the documentary series and learn more about the coal ash problem in our state.



Want to help spread the word?

- Follow the Georgia Chapter on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- Share the documentary chapters as they are released
- Tell a friend, your neighbor, your church, your community

We have a critical opportunity to pressure Georgia Power to move its toxic coal ash safely to dry, lined landfills. Spread the word, educate, and advocate for our health, communities, and environment!

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The millions of tons of coal ash stored in Georgia is the byproduct of burning coal for decades, and

it's one of the most carbon-intensive fossil fuels. Fighting for climate justice is about more than just reducing our emissions, it's about fighting for environmental justice for all.

Coal causes drastic climate change, but it also causes severe health issues in communities. Coal ash contaminants can seep into groundwater and make their way into nearby wells, rivers, and streams, impacting any bodies of water downstream. The chemicals found in coal ash have been found to raise the risk for cancer, heart disease, and stroke, and can inflict permanent brain damage on children. As Sierrans continue the fight to protect the Earth, we must push back against all forms of environmental harm.

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An **ADVANCED CITY** is not a place where the poor have cars. It's where the rich use **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**.

//

Paraphrased from Enrique Penalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia

Volunteer with one of our clean energy campaigns!

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

Scientists tell us that by 2030, the human population needs to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 50% from 2010 levels if we are to have a good chance to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. They also tell us that by 2050, we need to reach net-zero GHG emissions. This will be a heavy lift.

Unfortunately, our GHG emissions keep adding to the problem: The carbon dioxide we emit today will largely still be there for a century or more. Hence the urgency to transition away from use of fossil fuels for energy to clean renewable energy. We need **everyone** to participate in climate action for a livable climate. Ready to get involved?

Earth Day is on tap for April 22. We hope you participate in Earth Day activities in ways that are right for you and your families, given the pandemic. As part of our Earth Day activities, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter will be hosting a virtual film screening of our new coal ash documentary series on April 21 (go to bit.ly/GASC-EarthDay to RSVP)

Campaigns you can volunteer with:

One focus for 2021 for the Clean Energy Committee is planning for the upcoming Integrated Resource Planning (IRP) process by the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) in 2022. During this process, Georgia Power and the PSC decide what actions Georgia Power will take on electricity in GA for the 2022-2024 period. Sierra Club will join other environmental and environmental justice groups to intervene in this process to push for expanded use of clean, renewable energy, accelerated retirement of remaining

coal plants, expansion of efficiency programs for low income families, and other changes to better serve consumers and the environment.

Meanwhile, the Georgia EPD will be making decisions this year and next about plans proposed by Georgia Power for cleaning up their coal ash pits. Stay tuned for actions and events to pressure Georgia Power to properly dispose of this waste and absorb the costs. Dates for these decisions have been pushed back several times, but we need to be ready to stand with frontline communities on this issue.

The Ready for 100 campaign continues to work toward gaining commitments by cities and counties to transition to 100% clean, renewable energy: electricity by 2035, and other sectors (transportation, building heating and cooling, and industry) no later than 2050. We have a Ready for 100 toolkit to assist local campaigns in pursuing this goal. There is also a new accountability framework to guide working with communities for implementation of the 100% Clean Energy Action Plan post-commitment over the long term. Check out the toolkit at sierraclub.org/ready-for-100-toolkit.

Efficiency programs are an underutilized resource to reduce the need for energy in buildings. Georgia Power is conducting a pilot program for 500 low-income families using an on-bill tariff arrangement to make efficiency improvements, such as insulation and weatherization. In addition, the city of LaGrange has started a pilot program in their community using this model.

If you're interested in working with us, join us for a meeting of our Clean Energy Committee. We meet virtually on the third Wednesday of each month from 5 to 6:30 PM. The group is a collaboration between our Ready for 100 and Beyond Coal campaigns, as well as other partners across the state. Find the link to RSVP for our meetings on the Georgia Chapter's online calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar). You can also email Conservation Organizer Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org.

// The PRIMARY THREAT TO NATURE AND PEOPLE today comes from centralising and monopolising power and control. Not until diversity is made the logic of production will there be a chance for sustainability, justice and peace. Cultivating and conserving diversity is no luxury in our times: IT IS A SURVIVAL IMPERATIVE.

Vandana Shiva, leader and board member,
International Forum on Globalization

//

Georgia's COVID-19 Legislative Session ends

BY MARK WOODALL, CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The 2021 Georgia legislative session ended shortly after midnight, March 31. It's good that it's over. The 2021 session was expected to be difficult based on the COVID-19 restrictions on citizen participation, but in addition to the lack of access to legislators due to the pandemic, the session was dominated by attacks on voting rights. Although several bad rollbacks passed, there were some victories, such as passing the "Trust Fund Honesty" bill (see below). 2021 is the first year of a two-year session of the General Assembly, so many of these bills and related campaigns will carry over to 2022.

Many of the bills that passed this session described below are still waiting for the governor's signature in order to become law. While vetoes of these bills are unlikely, they are still possible.

VICTORY! Trust Fund Honesty on Governor's Desk

HB 511, the statutory language to make last November's Amendment One come to life, passed the legislature and awaits the Governor's signature. You may remember that Amendment One, which passed with 82% of the voters' support, gave the Legislature the ability to dedicate fees the state collects (like the tire disposal fee) to specific purposes (like cleaning up

tire dumps).

HB 511 uses this new ability to dedicate several fees, including the Solid Waste Trust Fund and the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund. Additionally, fees collected on every Uber/Lyft ride will be dedicated to transit for 10 years. This historic measure has been a project of the counties and conservation groups for well over a decade. Gov. Kemp has been a supporter of HB 511 (Rep. Bert Reeves, a floor leader for the Governor, carried HB 511), so we expect the governor will sign the bill.

ROLLBACKS

HB 150 is a bill to indirectly boost sales of fracked gas, now a matter of great interest to the Southern Company since they spent \$8 billion to buy Atlanta Gas Light. HB 150 preempts local control of fracked gas by not allowing local governments in Georgia to adopt building codes based on the source of energy they use. For example, some cities in the U.S. have banned the use of natural gas in new construction, though no Georgia city has done so. HB 150 is a slap in the face to Georgia cities such as Atlanta, Savannah, Athens-Clarke, and Clarkston who wish to move to a 100 percent clean energy future. HB 150 is one of several preemption bills that passed and will take away the powers of local governments.

SB 202 became the main vehicle for voter suppression based on the Big Lie told about the November election in Georgia. Rep. Barry Fleming snatched up SB 202 and substituted most of his HB 531 Jim Crow 2.0 junk on it, plus more voter suppression from the Senate bills. The bill reduces the amount of time a

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voter can request an absentee ballot, adds an ID requirement for absentee voting, reduces access to ballot drop boxes, gives the Legislature more power to intervene in local elections boards, prohibits distributing water and food to voters standing in line, and more. SB 202 was signed into law by Gov. Kemp and will result in long lines, such as were seen during the much maligned 2020 primary. Actions have consequences. Georgia has already lost the 2021 MLB All-Star game due to the passage of SB 202.

SB 260 is Senator Tyler Harper's preemption of buffers/setbacks of over 100 feet for application of "soil amendments." SB 260 is a big favor to Big Chicken industrial dumpers of industrial poultry waste. Due to problems with dumping in Elbert, Oglethorpe, Warren, Wilkes and elsewhere, local governments opposed the provision limiting all county-imposed buffers to a mere 100 feet, no matter how bad the odors rising behind that distance. On its first try, SB 260 failed in the House with 87 votes (as 91 votes are required to pass a law). Unfortunately, the bill was reconsidered and got 92 votes.

SB 221 is Senator Mullis' bill to allow money to be donated to "leadership committees" during the legislative session and is essentially an attempt to solicit bribes from those seeking particular outcomes on legislation. Governor Kemp needs to veto SB 221 unless he wants to go before the voters after a 2022 Legislative Session that has been corrupted by lobbyist-purchased legislation. More Leadership PACs means more DC-style politics in Atlanta. An amendment to an Ethics Commission bill, HB 333, would have prevented these new committees from taking contributions (bribes) during the session. The amendment was added in Senate Rules on Day 39 by Majority Whip Sen. Steve Gooch, but HB 333 did not get a Senate vote on Day 40.

BUDGET

SB 6 from Sen. John Albers is the latest example of the Senate Finance Committee members, led by Chairman Sen. Chuck Hufstetler, trying to find out how much money is being stolen by tax breaks that never seem to live up to their promises for jobs, etc. but manage to cost taxpayers plenty, every year.

Senator Hufstetler wrote a newspaper column in his hometown paper, the Rome News-Tribune, about how stealing bills work (check out the column at bit.ly/hufstetler-rnt) According to Senator Hufstetler, Georgia gives out over \$10 billion in sales tax breaks and income tax credits every year. Compared to the \$27 billion state budget, that is a

huge amount.

A \$6 million line item is in the budget for MARTA for renovation of the Bankhead station.

ENERGY

HB 647, the House GOP coal ash bill, failed in the Senate. The bill changes EPD rules into statute and sets the monitoring time to 50 years. The House Democrats' coal ash clean up bill, HB 176 by Rep. Buckner, and Senate Democrats' clean up bill by Senator Jen Jordan, SB 230, did not get a hearing. The House Natural Resources Committee chaired by Rep. Lynn Smith (R-Newnan) is now being referred to as "Death Valley" for killing good environmental legislation.

SB 299, also known as Solar Freedom 2.0, saw all Georgia solar industry sectors come together to address roadblocks to making Georgia more business-friendly for solar. HB 57 Solar Freedom by former Rep. Mike Dudgeon of North Fulton was a start when it passed in 2015 but many problems remain.

SB 299 was introduced too late in the Legislative Session for passage in 2021 but is poised for consideration and education over the interim and should be a top item in 2022. Carbondale, a village near Dalton, Georgia, is now the home of the largest photovoltaic panel factory in the western hemisphere, so solar power is important to Georgia's employment as well as its energy future.

HB 76 by Rep. John Carson raises Cobb EMC's cap on investment in Gas South from 15% to 60%. HB 76 failed due to Southern Company Gas (formerly AGL) meddling. The Senate versions of HB 76 also failed.

LAND/WATER/WILDLANDS/WASTE/TOXICS/JUSTICE

HB 748, the Coastal Marshlands Restoration Act, was a bill by Savannah's Rep. Jesse Petrea that also came too late for consideration in 2021. It embraces a complicated subject matter — old privately-owned titles to coastal marshlands — that is now even more complicated because the sea level rise is going to bring the saltmarsh inland onto additional privately-owned lands. This is a subject matter that is fraught with both hazards and opportunities for coastal resilience work.

In a brief moment of "wisdom, justice and moderation" as our state motto goes, **HB 479** passed which repealed Georgia's infamous citizen's arrest law.

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HB 244, Rep. Don Hogan’s repeat of a bill from 2020, passed this year. The bill allows unincorporated areas of counties to commit their insurance premium tax receipts for “flood risk avoidance.”

HR 52 by Rep. Katie Dempsey sets up a study committee to examine childhood lead exposure. The bill passed on Day 40. This effort is made at the request of Dr. Toomey, commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Several good bills sponsored by Democrats failed to get traction this session including SB 224, HB 339, HB 431, and SB 104.

SB 224 by Sen. Sally Harrell requires the Georgia Building Authority cafeterias switch from plastic to paper disposable containers. It is a first step toward getting the state to lead our way out of the waste explosion caused by Big Oil’s plastics overproduction.

HB 339 by Rep. Karla Drenner and others is the Georgia Environmental Justice Act, establishing a Georgia Environmental Justice Commission charged with evaluating various EPD permitted sites in the state looking at disproportionate environmental impacts based on their locations in communities of disadvantaged populations.

HB 431 by Rep. Drenner and others conditions all environmental permits and modifications of permits for their impacts on environmental justice.

SB 104 by Sen. Donzella James would ban plastic bags and styrene foam products from retail use.

Thanks to all who called, email, texted or contacted your state legislators. Your efforts made a difference. The session could have been much worse.

To be clear: the 2021 Legislative Session was particularly destructive to our voting rights, clean energy expansion, protecting our lands, and coal ash cleanup efforts.

This year’s session marked the beginning of a new era of Georgia politics in which real bipartisanship was few and far between. What Republican legislators have shown is that they represent a party with no real principles, just steadfast allegiance to corporate campaign funders and a tendency towards authoritarianism to silence any and all opponents.

Yet, despite these challenges, our Legislative Liaisons program and our Legislative Committee stood firm. Our wins show that our movement is growing: We surpassed recruitment goals for the Liaisons program by dozens of members, we sent over 100,000 text messages and thousands of phone calls to mobilize constituents in targeted districts, and we passed House Bill 511 after dozens of years of advocacy to restore trust fund honesty.

This marks year one in a two-year Legislative Session, and we will fight back, stronger than ever, in 2022—but only with your help. Go to bit.ly/GASC-LegisTeam to join our year-long volunteer efforts and join the movement!

**REGIONAL ACTION TO IMPROVE
LIVABILITY (R.A.I.L.) COMMITTEE**

Better buses, better future

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

GWINNETT & COBB

Transportation is the largest source of US carbon emissions, and needs to be targeted if we want a more sustainable future. There is going to be a surge in electric car options over the coming years from the federal government, and we have long been asking Georgia to reinstate its tax credits for EVs. Shifting to all EVs won’t address our climate crisis by itself, though. That would take a large amount of new clean energy infrastructure, and still

perpetuate the need for carbon intensive highways, parking lots, and urban sprawl. We need fewer miles travelled, fewer highways, and denser communities with more walking, biking, and transit if we want to create a climate-friendly society.

The federal government is poised to be a lot more transit-friendly in the coming years, and we have advocates in Congress, the USDOT, and in the White House. We can pull down a lot of federal support and money, but local money and local plans are necessary to begin that process. Over the next several months, there will be several opportunities for our members to get involved in local transit planning efforts, and making sure Sierrans are involved is key to ensuring that we create a Georgia that is climate-focused.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

MARTA BUS NETWORK REDESIGN

MARTA will be embarking on a bus network redesign over the next year. This involves reviewing its entire bus system and developing a wholesale redesign of routes in order to create a new bus network. The end results could mean more frequent service on high-ridership routes, new routes that connect destinations more directly, and eliminating routes that do not serve the system well.

Bus network redesigns have recently occurred in Austin, Houston, and Miami, and the cities have seen more frequent bus service, more riders, and more resilience in their transit systems overall.

There will be multiple opportunities for public engagement and input, and we want our members to be engaged in these efforts to make sure MARTA can

deliver a better bus system that addresses the needs of current riders and can draw in future riders. The more people who move by bus and train, the cleaner our society will be.

HENRY AND FORSYTH COUNTY

Henry and Forsyth Counties are actively engaged in transit planning efforts. Henry County has a lot of local officials who are open to expanding transit, but only if they have public support. Forsyth County may go towards a more modest expansion, but we can push them to be a lot more visionary.

We need Sierrans who live and work in Henry and Forsyth to be engaged in these efforts in order to push the county to expand bus service, create better connections within the county and to intown job centers, and start working on commuter rail.



WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

Okefenokee still at risk

BY JOSH MARKS, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER VOLUNTEER & OKEFENOKEE ISSUE LEADER

Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp is one of the largest and most diverse wetland ecosystems in the world. Stretching over 438,000 acres, it is home to hundreds of species of plants and animals and attracts more than 650,000 visitors each year.

But the Okefenokee continues to be under grave attack. As we have previously reported, Twin Pines Minerals, an Alabama mining company run by former coal mining executives, wants to open a titanium strip mine right next door on Trail Ridge, the ancient sand dune that helped form the Swamp and serves as its eastern barrier holding water in place.

Initially, Twin Pines had filed permit applications with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (wetland filling permit) and the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (surface mining operations permit). But a change in the federal law by the Trump administration removed the federal government’s jurisdiction over the mining project. All of the permitting action is now with the state of Georgia. The Georgia EPD is currently reviewing the permit applications for “completeness” and then is expected to perform a substantive review over the next several months. **Stay tuned for updates on sending your thoughts to the Georgia EPD when public comment periods open up.**

Meanwhile, we have also heard from reliable sources that Chemours, the DuPont spinoff that mines for titanium elsewhere in southeast Georgia, has been in talks with Twin Pines about its project, and may acquire it or the titanium the project produces if the permits are issued. This would elevate the threat to a much higher level, given that Chemours is a \$5 billion-per-year public company with unlimited resources to implement this dangerous plan.

It would also be a terrible abdication of the important conservation legacy that its predecessor, DuPont, secured when it abandoned an identical project next to the Okefenokee back in the 1990s and instead donated its land to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. And given the fact that Chemours already operates titanium mines elsewhere in southeast Georgia, the company has plenty of titanium and therefore no need to jeopardize the Okefenokee for more.

To forestall this possibility, Sierra Club is leading an effort to persuade Chemours to play the role of hero and not villain with the Okefenokee. We are asking all of our members to write to the CEO of Chemours and urge him to follow the lead of DuPont by publicly announcing that **(1) Chemours has no intention to buy the Twin Pines project or any titanium that the project produces; and (2) Chemours opposes any mining on Trail Ridge next to the Okefenokee, whether by Twin Pines or any other company.**

To send a message to the CEO of Chemours, go to bit.ly/okefenokee. For more information about this project and for ways to get involved, please contact Nancy Daves at nancydaves0711@gmail.com.

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, & **LEE GRAHAM**, CENTENNIAL GROUP OUTINGS CHAIR

HELLO SPRING & THANK YOU

We wish everyone a healthy, hopeful spring and a happy Earth Day Month! Thanks for “hanging in there” by joining our Zoom meetings; answering calls to action; taking care of yourselves and others; and finding safe ways to get outside as you manage busy lives.

Special appreciation to members who are also front-line workers, health care professionals, teachers, and those who served as 2020-21 election poll officials & volunteers.

RECENT MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

So far this year, we welcomed and we thank these excellent Centennial monthly meeting guest speakers:

- Jan 7th – Dr. Joe Blanda: “Birding for a Cause”
- Feb 4th – Mark Woodall & Neill Herring: “Under the Gold Dome: Legislative Update”
- Mar 4th – Dr. Liz Martin-Malikian: “Creating Sustainable Communities & Buildings”
- April 1st – Chris Hall, Tejas Kotak, Matt Stigall: “Equity & Inclusion in Transit Planning”

Centennial Group meetings & activities for April-June 2021 are still being confirmed. Please check our Centennial Group website, Facebook and Meetup pages, and E-Newsletter for updates and announcements. Thank you.

MESSAGE FROM LEE GRAHAM, CENTENNIAL GROUP OUTINGS CHAIR

It has been a full year since the Sierra Club was forced to cancel all outings due to COVID-19. During this difficult period, I have been grateful to take informal hikes every weekend this past year to enjoy the benefits of nature, stay connected with friends



Many thanks to Centennial Group members who worked as 2020-21 election volunteers and front-line health care workers, like Claudette Metz Sukenick, above, who did both!



Centennial Group Outings Chair Lee Graham

and exercise while following COVID-19 protocols. I’ve explored new trails, seen migrating birds, and exchanged books with others on the trail. I also revived my piano skills with a new piano and visited a parrot sanctuary where volunteers care for and even read books to the parrots, which the birds enjoy and which is a wonderful bird contact experience for us bird lovers. We eagerly await the return of Sierra Club outings. We commend those who have found ways to safely get outside and stay active in ways that are right for them.

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GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial
Facebook: facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club
MeetUp: meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club

GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

BY DAN FRIEDMAN, CHAIR,
GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

Earth Day, April 22, is upon us. How quick this year has gone with all the political, social, and environmental events that have happened. Earth Day reminds us that the environment is vitally important not only to our very quality of life but also the quality of life of our children and grandchildren. To wit: Miami Beach is expected to experience a two-foot rise in sea level by 2060.

More locally, Georgia could be heating up significantly. From 1971 to 2000, Georgia averaged four days a year with a heat index over 105. In a study conducted by the Union for Concerned Scientists last year, Georgia will see an average of 77 days each year with a heat index over 105 degrees by the end of the century if nothing changes.

What does this mean for us? Reduced or elimination of pecan, peach, vidalia onions, and peanut crops. The additional heat will bring longer mosquito seasons, increased risk from heat to young and old, and more tropical diseases.

These are just a few of the reasons why climate change is so dangerous and why Earth Day and April ("Earth Month") are so important. While Earth Day is closely associated with planting trees, there are many other things that will be happening: stream monitoring, river clean-ups, and talking to your political representatives.

Many participated in Capitol Conservation Day this year and contacted their state lawmakers about environmental issues, but talking to your local officials at the city and county level about converting to cleaner energy is also important. In fact the Sierra Club has a program directed at this very activity. It's called Ready For 100 (see page 8 for an update from the Ready For 100 Team) and it works with city and county governments to transition to clean energy by 2035. Even small efforts like planting a garden with vegetables, herbs, or flowers can have an impact. It may seem small, but multiplied by thousands and millions, it will have a large effect.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett

Facebook: [facebook.com/](https://facebook.com/Gwinnett-Sierra-Club-109645614080930)

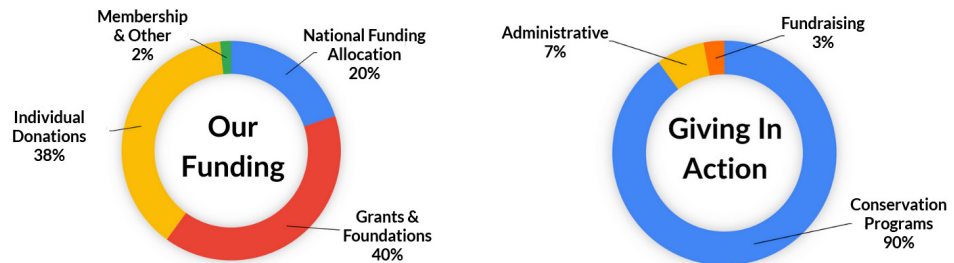
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Make a local impact by giving to the Georgia Chapter!

Did you know **less than 5%** of your annual membership dues goes back to the Georgia Chapter?

When you donate directly to the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, 100% of your gift stays in Georgia and helps support our local conservation programs.

38% of our income comes from individual donors. We are expecting a decline in these donations this year due to COVID-19. If you are able to give, we hope you'll consider making a gift.



Make a gift the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter!

Enclosed is my gift to the Sierra Club

Georgia Chapter:

\$250__ \$100__ \$50__ Other:\$__

Please make your check payable to
"Sierra Club Georgia Chapter"

Mail to:

743 E College Ave, Suite B
Decatur, GA 30030

Give online: www.sierraclub.org/georgia/give

To pay by credit card, please fill out this form

MasterCard Visa Discover Amex

Name: _____

Credit Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Amount: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

LAGRANGE GROUP

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

BY MARY LOU DABBS, CO-CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP

The LaGrange Group Leadership Team continues our monthly meetings using Zoom. We've coordinated with Sierra Club National to assess the likelihood of success in convincing our small city to pledge to be Ready for 100 and committing to transitioning to 100 percent clean energy. Several club members have been active in the Chapter-driven legislative liaison process and participated in this year's Capital Conservation Day.

Individual members have also remained involved in the community: participating in a water-front clean-up and some of the city sponsored neighborhood clean-ups. Future plans include participating as a Sierra Team in another waterfront clean-up sponsored by the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Our Chapter liaison continues to represent our group in Chapter Executive Committee meetings.

We've conducted general meetings using Zoom including one on solar energy and another on legislative updates. We have been tag-teaming some meetings with the Savannah River Group and future plans include more of this collaboration across groups. Future meeting topics include a presentation about the Georgia Pollinator Census, and an update from the Ray Anderson Foundation on their innovative projects to minimize the environmental impacts of highways and transportation on The Ray, an 18-mile

stretch of Interstate 85 that runs through Troup County.

Our Group has continued investment in public relations within the community by sponsoring a bench on our multi-use trail, and will soon add more bird boxes, also with our logo, to the newest section of this local community trail.



We are gearing-up to expand and augment plantings and have installed a locally made cedar trellis at our local pollinator garden, now a certified Monarch Waystation. Additionally, several members have begun collecting and reporting nesting data to the Cornell Nestwatch program from the club's soon to be 25 bluebird boxes.

Our Outings Leader has been scouting future field trip sites and we look forward to sharing trails again.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/241982449162866

METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

GROUP MEETINGS

We have just completed a full year of holding meetings online, with the option to call in on a phone line or participate from a computer or smartphone. With all meetings held remotely, it has become easier this year for many Sierra Club community members across the metro area and beyond to take part. Likewise, remote meetings have offered our group the opportunity to collaborate with other local groups on monthly meetings when we would not have before. Even when we eventually begin meeting in

person again, we intend to continue to include an on-line option in the future in order to carry forward this type of accessibility. Whether you're new to Georgia Sierra Club this year or if you've been a member for years, you're invited to our next group meeting!

In January 2021, we did not hold a regular meeting, mainly because we were investing all our time in runoff election work. We encouraged members and volunteers to participate in trainings on how to hold our state officials accountable through lobbying, among other opportunities.

On Feb. 4, we teamed up with Centennial Group and Gwinnett Group to host Neill Herring (Sierra Club Georgia Chapter contract lobbyist) and Mark

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Woodall (Chapter Vice-Chair for Conservation and Legislative Committee Chair) as our speakers at the annual state legislative update meeting. At this meeting, we learned about key bills in this year's 40-day legislative session that could have major consequences for our lives by affecting the air, water, and land with which we are connected. We also discussed how we, as members of the public, can make a difference on whether bills pass or fail.

In March, we invited our members and volunteers to tune in to a presentation on about creating sustainable communities and buildings, hosted by our friends in the Sierra Club Centennial Group. The featured speaker for this meeting was Dr. Liz Martin-Malikian, a Professor of Architecture at Kennesaw State University in the College of Architecture and Construction Management. We also encouraged our group to take action against state legislative bills propping up the gas industry and attempting voter suppression, as well as to contact elected officials to protect the Okefenokee Swamp.

CONNECTIONS TO THE CLIMATE CHANGE FIGHT

When we consider and make endorsements for candidates, and then support endorsed candidates in elections, we are working to set up favorable conditions for wise policymaking and good governance with regard to the climate (and our environment overall). By electing officials who commit to protecting our environment for all, we start from a better position to advocate for the climate-related policies we support. And our work to hold elected officials accountable — no matter whether we endorsed them — is needed to help keep any positive progress on track. In our efforts to stop state legislative bills that try to prevent local governments from making the transition to 100% clean energy, and with Atlanta city elections coming up in November, we'll do our political work keeping in mind the impact that we can make with local policies. Will Atlanta residents elect a mayor and city council who will actively move forward with the city's plans for an equitable transition to 100% clean energy? How soon can our cities and counties redirect funding from policing and incarceration to green jobs programs, low-carbon transit, and other community investments? And to what extent can local governments collaborate on the future of land use in our metro area, to prevent car-centric sprawl from spewing out more greenhouse gases, eating up more forests, and devouring the precious time we spend in traffic? The answers to these questions lie in part in the aims of the officials we elect, our ability to hold them to their promises, and our capacity to dream about the possibilities ahead.

CITY OF ATLANTA ELECTIONS

Sometimes it feels like 2020 is barely behind us, but it's already time to prepare for another set of important elections, this time at the local level. Elections for Atlanta's mayor and city council are coming up on Nov. 2, 2021. Many candidates have already begun to campaign, and soon we will outline our priorities in these elections and consider candidates for endorsement. Ready to help elect officials who will commit to protecting our environment for all? **Please let us know if you would like to get involved!**

STONE MOUNTAIN PARK ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITY

Did you know that the state authority tasked with protecting Stone Mountain Park as a recreation area is also required to maintain it as a Confederate memorial? Recently, community members and local organizations formed the Stone Mountain Action Coalition (stonemountainaction.org) to work on transforming Stone Mountain Park into an inclusive and welcoming space for all.

The aims expressed by the coalition align with Sierra Club's new position on Confederate & colonizer monuments, which states, in part: "Public spaces — especially our parks, public lands, and schools — are meant to be enjoyed by all, and the glorification of white supremacists through these monuments and markers is demeaning and insulting to those of us who continue to suffer at the hands of brutality, racism and discrimination. As such, the Sierra Club supports the removal of these statues and monuments from all public lands and spaces."

Do you love to hike in Stone Mountain Park? Do you have fond memories of going to the laser show when you were growing up? Or did you bike to the park for the first time this year? If the aims of the coalition resonate with you, and especially if you feel a personal connection to the park, **please let us know if you would like to get involved.**

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.

STAY UP TO DATE

If you don't get our monthly meeting announcements

but would like to, sign up for email updates through the Georgia Chapter website (sierraclub.org/georgia) and be sure to include your Atlanta-area zip code.

The Metro Atlanta Group generally meets on the second Tuesday of each month. Typically our meetings feature a speaker on a timely topic. Then, we discuss and present info on how to take action on important issues. Some months we do not hold a regular

meeting, so please check the Chapter calendar, our webpage, and our Facebook page for updates.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta
Facebook: facebook.com/SierraClubATL

SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

The Savannah River Group (SRG) RAIL chair, Chris Hall, has been working on both sides of the Savannah River. He was instrumental in bringing Ready for 100 to South Carolina through the Mayors for 100 initiative, which led to Columbia's commitment to 100% clean energy. On the Georgia side, Chris is focused on transit to ensure that equity issues are addressed.



Chris Hall takes a dip with an advocate for clean water.

SRG's Adopt-a-Stream (AAS) program, a subcommittee of the Sierra Club Water Sentinels, has been monitoring each of its ten sites throughout the pandemic but restricting the number of volunteers. In addition to the chemical and biological tests, we have documented observations of growing problems with erosion of the creek banks, increasing sedimentation

and trash, the expansion of invasive plants, and an intense increase in feral swine activities.



The increase in feral swine is not limited to natural reproduction. It's also become a business, illegal that is, to turn hogs loose so that they can be hunted later. A 2017 study by researchers at the University of Georgia identified 154 commercial hog-hunting operations in 14 states, mostly in the Southeast. Georgia ranked #2 having wild hog hunting outfitters.

The Georgia Soil & Water Conservation (GACD) has a Feral Swine Initiative to address the feral swine issue in Georgia. Richmond, Burke, Jenkins, and Screven counties are among the 46 counties included in the initiative.

SRG members Tim Nelken and Lawrence Komp are Columbia County Supervisors for Soil & Water, as well as volunteers with AAS. Addressing the feral swine issue in Columbia County is currently under consideration.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River
Facebook: facebook.com/groups/241982449162866
RSVP for upcoming meetings: bit.ly/SRG-Meeting-RSVP

// ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE embraces the principle that ALL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES are entitled to EQUAL PROTECTION of environmental, energy, health, employment, education, housing, transportation, and civil rights laws. //

Robert Bullard, author, known as 'Father of Environmental Justice'

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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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2021 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom) meets every other month. The meetings are being held virtually until further notice.

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

Meeting dates are subject to

change, so email gasierraclub@gmail.com to confirm the dates.

The Georgia Chapter ExCom's remaining 2021 meetings are scheduled for:

- May 15 - Noon
- July 17 - Noon
- September 18 - Noon
- November 20 - Noon

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Change service requested

VISIT US ONLINE

Check out our website (sierraclub.org/georgia) to learn more about the 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: @GASierraClub