

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • APRIL / MAY / JUNE 2022



EARTH DAY 2022!

INSIDE: LEGISLATIVE SESSION RECAP • MEET OUR NEW OUTINGS CHAIR

BUILDING A STRONGER SIERRA CLUB • CAMDEN SPACEPORT GROUNDED • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS AND MORE!

AT THE TRAILHEAD

Join us for Earth Day!

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

We're excited to announce the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's upcoming Earth Day event!

Join us, in coalition with a dozen organizations, for an outdoor Earth Day rally and celebration on April 23 from noon to 2 pm at Liberty Plaza behind the Georgia Capitol in downtown Atlanta. We are calling on local public officials, state wide regulatory agencies, and members of Congress to take bold leadership and deliver true environmental justice to Georgians. We are demanding an approach from all levels of leaders to bring to Georgia climate action, jobs in the green economy, and justice for all.

Register at bit.ly/EarthDayATL22.

Enough is enough: Climate can't wait, Georgia. Every year, the heat rises, storms worsen, and authoritarians use oil and gas to fuel their geopolitical power plays. We need a massive build-out of clean energy to preserve a habitable planet through

the Integrated Resource Plan and congressional budget slated for climate justice.

If Congress, the Georgia Public Service Commission, and local municipal governments don't invest in an equitable transition to renewable energy and an expanded social safety net, they will leave us vulnerable to the whims of devastating climate breakdown. They will also leave millions of good jobs on the table.

Now is the time to give it everything we've got. We have multiple paths forward for historic clean energy and social investments — but we'll need a public groundswell to get them across the finish line. Join us in holding our representatives at every scale of government accountable to our future.

Programming for this event will include guest speakers, live entertainment, and ways you can take action to advocate for climate action.

If you're interested in volunteering for this event, reach out to Jillian directly at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org.

Masking and social distancing for this event is recommended.

CHAPTER NEWS

COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter has resumed holding local outings and a limited number of in-person events. The Chapter has new protocols and guidelines for holding events and outings. Chapter leaders seeking to hold in-person events should reach out to Tia Fay for more information about these protocols (see directory on page 18 for contact information).

For the latest on our response

to the COVID-19 pandemic and links to many available community resources, visit sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates.

CONGRATS TO ANGELA JIANG!

Please help us congratulate Angela Jiang on her promotion to Conservation Program Manager! In this new role, Angela will continue her organizing efforts and begin managing her own team of organizers focusing on political and legislative work. Congrats again!

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On the Cover

Clean energy activists march in Decatur's Mead Road Mardi Gras Parade in February.

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Meet Charline Whyte, the Beyond Coal campaign's new senior campaign representative for Georgia!

BY SIERRA CLUB BEYOND COAL TEAM

The Beyond Coal Campaign is dedicated to ending the use of fossil fuels. In order to fight climate change, improve public health, and reduce pollution, a swift transition to clean, renewable energy must be prioritized. The Beyond Coal Campaign in Georgia has helped retire many coal plants in the state, and we are so excited Charline Whyte has joined our team. Learn more about her by checking out the interview below!

Q: What got you interested in working with the Beyond Coal Campaign?

A: I have lived a privileged life. I acknowledge that during my 43 plus trips around the sun, I have enjoyed the comforts of living in a fully electrified household. Like most of us, the daily use of electricity and appliances makes my life easier. For many years I did not question how the electricity was made and the environmental consequences that are tied to fossil fueled electricity. That acknowledgment also comes with a sense of responsibility. Amid a global climate crisis, there is simply "no time for spectators." I don't pretend to want a future without electricity. I want a future powered by clean energy and to make "sacrifice zones" a thing of the past.

Q: What do you see in the future for the Beyond Coal Campaign in Georgia?

A: The Beyond Coal Campaign in Georgia will continue to fight against an electricity system powered by fossil fuels like coal with hopes of eliminating fossil fuel reliance altogether. The Campaign will push against retrofitting retired coal units with fracked gas and work to curtail any new gas construction proposals. We will advocate for clean, renewable energy (preferably a mix of energy efficiency, solar, and battery storage) that is just and equitable. The Campaign will also work to democratize the production and management of energy resources to include social ownership of energy infrastructure, decentralization of energy systems, and redistribution of economic power.



Photo courtesy of Charline Whyte

Charline enjoying a day on the trail with her four-legged friends.

Q: What is one piece of advice you would give to someone interested in working on our transition to renewable energy?

A: Under the lens of environmental and social justice, any transition to renewable energy must be centered around the principles of equity. There is no magic bullet that can quickly transform dirty energy into just and clean energy. There are a lot of factors at play, including political power, technological barriers, time, and resource distribution. We need to work with the regulatory agencies and the utility companies to transform the economy to ensure all people thrive, not just the profits of corporations and the pockets of the few. I approach solutions using three-prongs: (1) utility companies need to step up to the challenge and yet remain profitable, (2) we need to hold utility companies accountable for the environmental and human impacts created and any attempts to slow down legislation that can speed up renewable energy production and/or distribution and (3) consumers need to be educated and empowered to make better choices and pull together to press for change.

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Q: What is one of your favorite memories associated with being outside in nature?

A: I treasure every walk I take with my two furry ones, Mia and Buddy, out in the woods. No music, no phone, no agenda. Just "Three Amigos" exploring together and enjoying sounds, smells, and views that our beautiful planet has to offer.

Q: What has been one of your favorite places to explore in Georgia? What makes it special?

A: My family and I have enjoyed hiking the Cloudland Canyon State Park of Lookout Mountain. In part, the park offers scenic canyons and sandstone cliffs views. It is also pet friendly and has multiple trails that lead to waterfalls. Being born and raised in Costa Rica, a tropical country, Cloudland is very special to me because it was the first time I experienced watching frozen water shaped like popsicles hanging on the side of a rock wall. It was beautiful.

Q: Do you have any hidden talents?
A: I would not call it a talent, but I have been trying to learn how to play the violin. I have taken weekly

classes since April 2018. While an invitation to a concert is decades away, I am not as squeaky as I used to be. So, not a talent per se, but an example of discipline and commitment.

COAL ASH UPDATES

The public comment period for the Plant Bowen coal ash permit wrapped in November, and we are happy to report that thanks to the help of Georgia Sierrans and supporters we submitted 650 comments to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

The EPD has released an updated permit schedule for the remaining coal ash permits it will be considering, slotting the coal ash permits for Plant McDonough and Plant Scherer for April-May 2022. Be sure to sign up for updates at GeorgiaCoalAsh.org to make your voice heard to protect our water and health!

CLIMATE ACTION CAMPAIGN

Climate Can't Wait, Georgia!

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The Climate Action Campaign of Georgia is busy engaging Sierra Club members and supporters to push for federal advocacy and investments in climate, jobs, and justice targeted at President Biden. While the vehicle for realizing our investment goals has changed, the drumbeat continues.

Things kicked off on February 4th at an in-person town hall in Decatur hosted by Senator Raphael Warnock. Supporters of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter gathered to ask the senator directly about his stance on the former reconciliation



Photo credit: Ricky Leroux

On Presidents' Day weekend, Sierra Club activists rallied at Little Five Points in Atlanta in support of federal action to address the climate crisis.

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bill, the Build Back Better Act. Senator Warnock gave us a nod by indicating that he is supportive of the bill in whatever way it may come to the floor. We were pleased by Senator Warnock's commitment to the people of Georgia.

In addition to making a splash at events hosted by federally elected officials, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, along with Georgia Interfaith Power and Light and Moms Clean Air Force Georgia, hosted a rally on Presidents' Day weekend. Fifteen activists descended upon the Little 5 Points neighborhood of Atlanta to celebrate the anniversary of President Biden's executive orders, putting the country back on track in advancing climate solutions. We also urged the President to use all resources available to him to lead the charge for federal investments in climate change mitigation. This resulted in 25 individuals

signing a petition calling on Biden for his leadership to #ActOnClimate.

Finally, we continue to meet with our democratic senators to urge them to speak with other members to pass investments in climate, jobs, and justice. We often team up with other organizations to merge interests and align on shared values in these constituent meetings. We are always looking for others to join us, so please consider reaching out!

You can expect the Climate Action Campaign will partner with other environmental organizations to host more outdoor in-person rallies this upcoming quarter, virtual letter writing parties, and ways to engage for Earth Day. If you are interested in getting involved with federal advocacy in Georgia, you can sign up and stay up to date through sc.org/ClimateGA.

CLEAN ENERGY COMMITTEE

Join the Georgia Chapter's Clean Energy Committee!

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The Clean Energy Committee is back and better than ever! After a brief hiatus, we have reconvened folks to advocate for clean energy in the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). The IRP is a process in which the elected Public Service Commission holds hearings for how Georgia Power will source its energy for the next 20 years. For more information on the IRP process and the role the Public Service Commission plays in it, read our explanation of the process at bit.ly/irp-explainer.

Join us at Committee meetings to engage in mobilization efforts such as rallies, submitting public comment, and educational opportunities like town halls and webinars. We will announce regular meetings online and send out invitations for in-person events as they are scheduled. Check our calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/



Photo credit: Angela Jiang
Activists rally outside the Georgia Public Service Commission office during the first hearing of the 2022 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) process on April 4.

[calendar](#)) for upcoming meetings.

To stay up to date on ways you can get involved with clean energy advocacy in the IRP, sign up at sc.org/IRP-22.

In addition to hosting the Clean Energy Committee, we are also coordinating our grassroots efforts

with our allied partner organizations to collectively advocate for clean energy in the IRP. In this collaboration space, we are planning and coordinating various mobilization efforts. If your organization would like to get involved, contact Georgia Beyond Coal Organizer Neil Sardana at neil.sardana@sierraclub.org.

Building a stronger Sierra Club

BY RAMÓN CRUZ, PRESIDENT,
SIERRA CLUB

[Note: For this edition of the Georgia Sierran, the Equity Committee invites you to read this message from Sierra Club President Ramón Cruz about how our core values, anchored in equity and justice, can expand the environmental movement.]

For close to a decade, staff and volunteers have been working to transform the Sierra Club into an environmental organization with justice and equity at its core — a transformation that is key to saving the planet. But what does that mean in practice?



RAMÓN CRUZ

It means listening to, and acting on, the moral clarity of those who have been the main victims of environmental crises but don't have seats at the decision-making tables. It involves deepening our understanding of how racism and other systems of oppression fuel environmental harm and recognizing that because the Sierra Club is a well-resourced leader in the environmental movement, the onus is on us to work to dismantle those harms. Above all, a transformation requires that we be responsible allies to those most affected by environmental degradation.

Let me give an example from my own experience. Last year, I joined the Sierra Club's delegation at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland—a.k.a. COP26. We went to Glasgow to advocate for strong climate action to fulfill the Paris Agreement's ambitions and to elevate the voices of our partners in the formerly colonized countries that are most vulnerable in the climate crisis. While Global North countries like the United States and the United Kingdom are responsible for the lion's share of emissions, it's the Global South, such as poorer nations in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, that suffers the most.

The inequitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and the high cost of attendance at the conference created significant barriers to entry for the Global South. So the Sierra Club's International Program, led by Cherelle Blazer, held a Global Grassroots Leaders Climate Summit ahead of COP26, offering community leaders a platform to communicate directly with US decision-makers. At the conference itself, we leveraged the strength of the Sierra Club community to ensure that global grassroots leaders were represented. As a result of strong advocacy from the Sierra Club and other NGOs, the summit negotiators made meaningful progress toward addressing the climate crisis, though we still have a long way to go.

In 2022, the Sierra Club continues to strive to be a responsible ally in every space we are in. We're teaming up with racial-justice organizations to protect the freedom

to vote in the face of nationwide attacks on our democracy. We're partnering with the Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe and Latino communities on Texas's Gulf Coast to stop a massive buildout of fracked-gas pipelines and export terminals. These terminals at once threaten our climate and pose unacceptable dangers to the Carrizo/Comecrudo Tribe and the communities of color where the terminals are slated to be built. And every Sierra Club chapter is working to forge similar connections with local partners.

We will no longer be the influential and enduring environmental organization that we've been if we do not meet global environmental crises head-on and build a cohesive, diverse movement that can prevail over the injustices perpetrated by the fossil fuel industry. We cannot tackle a problem that big alone. We have to share leadership with those organizations based in the communities most exposed to the climate crisis and fossil fuel pollution, which are often low-income communities of color. And we must do it while living our values of collaboration, anti-racism, and justice.

Preparing the Sierra Club to face the challenges that lie ahead will take time, effort, and commitment—and it is imperative. If we transform the Sierra Club into a truly responsible ally, we'll be able to do so much more to slow the climate crisis, protect awe-inspiring public lands, and ensure a safe and healthy environment for all. That's the opportunity this moment presents. Let's seize it.

This article appeared in the Spring quarterly edition of Sierra Magazine with the headline "Core Values."

Georgia's unproductive Legislative Session ends

BY MARK WOODALL, CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Georgia Legislature ended its 2022 session shortly after midnight on Monday, April 4. With the exception of a few small gains, the General Assembly failed to pass good environmental legislation.

The session was dominated by social issues promoted by Governor Kemp, the GOP candidates for lieutenant governor, and most any Republican who feared a primary challenge. Many gun bills were introduced. A law allowing concealed weapons to be carried without a permit — also known as constitutional carry or criminal carry — passed. A bill to allow more guns in churches failed. The “Big Lie” election bill that would have opened our elections up to frivolous investigations, HB 1464, was gutted. The only election provision sent to the governor’s desk was in SB 441, which would give the Georgia Bureau of Investigation original jurisdiction in election cases. Thankfully, SB 171, an attack on free speech and protesters’ rights, failed.

“BAD NEIGHBOR” BILL PASSES

With a big assist from the Georgia Farm Bureau, the Georgia Poultry Federation passed HB 1150, the “Bad Neighbor” bill, on the final day. HB 1150 repeals Georgia’s current “Right to Farm” law passed in 1989. It gives current farmers and landowners only two years to file a nuisance lawsuit if a polluting/harmful industrial agriculture operation (like giant chicken houses or similar concentrated animal feeding facilities) moves in next door. Once that two-year period ends, the nuisance that moves in is given total immunity from

nuisance litigation. Unfortunately, it typically takes time for a nuisance to develop and for property owners to try to resolve the situation without a lawsuit. HB 1150 was supported by Governor Kemp and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce. It is disgusting and disgraceful that the Farm Bureau’s top priority was a bill to take away the rights of current farmers in favor of industrial agricultural operators moving in.

NO VOLTAGE FOR ENERGY BILLS

On the final day of the session, the House passed a resolution blasting President Joe Biden and calling for an “end to restrictions” on new fossil fuel pipelines and oil drilling operations. Reps. Josh McLaurin, Beth Moore, Shelly Hutchinson, and Gregg Kennard pushed back on the false narrative of the bill, but the resolution, introduced by trucking company owner Rep. Emory Dunahoo, still passed.

The passage of the resolution was representative of a session in which good energy policy was ignored or blocked. Three bills to address coal ash in groundwater died. Four bills to fix the arbitrary 5,000-customer cap Georgia Power has on solar power monthly net metering (which allows property owners with solar panels to sell excess electricity back to the grid for bill credits) were killed by Georgia Power. Three bills to address electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure went nowhere. Apparently, Georgia Power is satisfied with the status quo.

WILDLANDS AND WILDLIFE

A Sierra Club priority, HB 1289, failed to get a hearing. The bill would have prevented any mining on Trail Ridge, the eastern rim of the Okefenokee Swamp. While the bill wouldn’t have stopped Twin Pines’ proposed mine in that area, a project the Sierra Club

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Sierra Club Legislative Liaisons and other environmental activists pose for a photo after meeting with their legislators as part of Capitol Conservation Day in March.

Georgia Chapter has been fighting against for years now, it would have guaranteed long-term protection for the area.

In the good news category, HB 748 got four hearings but ultimately failed to move forward. The bill would have made it easier to use obscure pre-Revolutionary War land grants to claim ownership of coastal marshlands that the state has been protecting for years.

Unfortunately, a bill allowing the year-round hunting and trapping of possums and raccoons passed and awaits the governor's signature. The bill, HB 1147, was supported by the Georgia DNR in spite of no evidence that such a program will increase the population of wild turkeys (possums and raccoons are being blamed for harming the turkey population by eating turkey eggs).

RESTRICTING LOCAL CONTROL

There were many bills that sought to remove or preempt local control over various activities. Preemption is now a favorite tactic of big corporations like Georgia Power who have undue influence at the legislature. For example, HB 1301 would have prevented local governments from enacting rules for when gasoline-powered leaf blowers can be used or sold. HB 1301 failed to pass, despite attempts by its sponsor to amend the language into another bill. Hedge funds and other corporate housing operators were unable to pass HB 1093 or SB 494, which were preemption bills that would have prevented local governments from regulating rental properties.

STUDIES AND REFORMS

SR 463 creating a joint study committee on the electrification of transportation passed, so hopefully some good policy gets written and proposed once that committee begins its work. There was also \$112 million in the amended 2022 budget for the Rivian EV-manufacturing plant proposed for an area east of Atlanta, so EV policy did move forward in some areas.

Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver's HB 923 to reform the ethics of development authorities passed, as did legislation to establish study committees on development authority operations. Development authorities all over Georgia have been involved in providing tax-payer funded incentives to unethical and anti-environmental projects, such as the proposed Brightmark plastics pyrolysis plant in Macon. So progress on reform is very welcome.

A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 LEGISLATIVE LIAISONS!

Protecting the environment during Legislative Session is always difficult for advocates. That's why it's particularly extraordinary when members choose to engage at the Legislature through our Legislative Liaisons constituent lobbying program. It was an absolute pleasure working together with our Legislative Liaisons cohort this session! The members we want to recognize are listed below:

Linda Bell
Laura Breyfogle
Sam Booher
Max Brown
Frank Carl
Nancy Daves
Eddie Ehlert
David Emory
Charlie Froelich
Kathe Gowland
Seth Gunning
Helen McLaughlin

Emma McMullan
Jack Miklaucic
Andrew Pietkiewicz
Scott Presson
Art Sheldon
Judey Thessen
Elizabeth Treadwell
Lynn Walston
Cindy Weinbaum
Mark Woodall
Bobbie Wrenn
Shirling Xu

We also want to give a special shoutout to our 2022 State Policy Intern, Aliya Elmore, for providing staff support to our Liaisons and energy to our meetings!

Building long-term power at the Capitol isn't possible without constituents like you. There is no prior experience needed to become a Liaison — only a willingness and passion for passing pro-environmental laws! We will provide all training and support to help you become an effective environmental advocate at the State Capitol. Consider joining our 2023 Legislative Liaisons cohort by applying here: tinyurl.com/2023-Liaisons.

A FEW FEES AND PROTECTION FROM LEAD

HB 893 by Rep. Randy Nix extends certain hazardous waste fees for five years and is waiting for the governor's signature. Unfortunately, Rep. Debbie Buckner's bill to dedicate those hazardous waste fees to the Hazardous Waste Trust Fund failed to pass. SB 516,

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which proposed to change the collection of the \$1 per tire disposal fee to the wholesale level from the retail level, also failed to pass.

At the request of Dr. Toomey at the Department of Public Health, HB 1355 passed this year. HB 1355, the Child Lead Exposure Act, strengthens protections for children against lead poisoning. Thanks to Senator Elena Parent who got a controversial amendment regarding certificate of need removed from the bill by asking the Lt. Governor to rule on the relevance of

the amendment.

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP, SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

Thanks to Georgia Chapter Conservation Organizer Angela Jiang and our intern Aliya Elmore for their work in support of the Legislative Team. Thanks to Neill Herring, our contract lobbyist since 1989. Most of all, thanks to all of you that contacted your legislators on Sierra Club issues. It would have been a lot worse without your people power.



OUTINGS

Welcome new Outings Chair: Grant Brown

BY LEE GRAHAM, OUTGOING INTERIM OUTINGS CHAIR

Grant Brown has recently been appointed the Georgia Chapter Outings Chair! Grant is a Sierra Club National Outings Leader for Southeast, Northeast, and Knapsack Sub-Committees and Southeastern Outings Committee Officer.

Grant is a Georgia native and has been leading backpacking groups since 1997. He started backpacking as a Cub Scout and has over-nighted in many national parks including Yosemite, Yellowstone, Badlands, Isle Royale, Channel Islands, Smoky Mountains, and Congaree, as well as the Inca Trail in Peru. In addition to leading outings, Grant is a gourmet trail cook, musician, photographer, and educator.

A retired high school teacher, he directed multiple award-winning state high school plays and was selected as Georgia's Outstanding Drama Educator for 2010. He's worked with teenagers in theater production and field trips to New York City. He is thrilled to now

CALLING ALL OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS!

Do you:

- Enjoy spending time outside?
- Frequent local parks and trails in your area?
- Have a flair for coordinating details?
- Want to help others foster a love for the outdoors?

Consider becoming a Georgia Chapter Outings Leader! Join us **April 23rd at Sweetwater Creek State Park** for a **FREE** training session that will put you well on your way to hosting outings of your very own to your most treasured places across the state.

In this session, you'll learn:

- how to lead groups safely in the outdoors;
- trip planning, risk, and emergency management;
- leadership, and decision-making skills; and
- tips and tricks for publicizing and promoting your trip.

Stick around for the afternoon, join us for an optional \$30 Basic First Aid Class with an emphasis on Outdoor First Aid. A first aid class is highly recommended, but not required for new Outings Leaders.

Learn more & sign up today at bit.ly/Outings-Leader-Training.

lead teens in the outdoors. At home, Grant is a dog sitter and has an acoustic band in which he plays guitar, mandolin, percussion, and vocals. His medical certifications are Wilderness First Aid, Epi-Pen Auto-injector, and CPR/AED.

Also joining our ranks of Outings Leaders is Steve Mintz, a long-time Sierra Club member who has participated in the National Outings program since 1992. When out on the trail, Steve enjoys the

camaraderie, scenery, and fishing local lakes and streams. At home, Steve enjoys socializing with friends, gardening, fishing the Chattahoochee, and spending time with his lovely wife.

See the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter Outings Calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/outingscalendar) for future outings and sign up for emails about our upcoming outings at bit.ly/ga-outings.

A lack of true leadership

BY EDDIE EHLERT, CHAIR, POLITICAL COMMITTEE

I don't know how closely our members follow the daily machinations of the General Assembly, and I can forgive you if it isn't at your top of mind. I mention this because if you only catch the headlines during the session, you might come to the conclusion that all aspects of addressing climate change and remediating years of overlooked pollution have been solved. One might start to believe that our education system is under assault because fewer people hold reverence for our historical mythology. We could be led to fear the "sport" of deer hunting is in danger because raccoons and possums are raiding the bait and that extermination of the raiders is imperative! That's just a thumbnail of the nonsense that passes for elected leadership in this state these days. A windfall in revenue is seen as a reason for a quick tax cut, rather than to apply the funds to long-eschewed obligations (such as the state portion of education funding).

While pandering to special interests in the General Assembly is nothing really new, refusal to confront reality has reached new heights. The notion of taking actions to help or benefit the majority of Georgians has been rendered impossible. Reality-based legislators have faced new, ever more ridiculous legislation clearly focused on enhancing the goals (and profits) of those funding the campaigns of the fantasy legislators. One can only hope the warped activities of this session might finally suggest a "bottom" in terms of how bad it can get.

This year, the Legislature made it harder to sue if a massive hog operation moves in next door and your property values plummet because of the smell and pollution it causes. Lawmakers made it legal to carry a hidden gun without a permit. And the new maps they drew and approved for seats in Congress, the state Legislature, and even local county commissions and boards of education seek to ensure that the balance of power cannot shift against them even if most Georgians disagree with their actions.

Meanwhile, sea level rise along the coast continues to worsen, and those living just inland will experience greater flooding as the water table is heaved to the surface by hydrostatic pressure of the sea. Flood events that used to earn pages in the history books are becoming annual, seasonal, and worse. Tropical storms and severe hurricanes are becoming more and

more common, causing millions of dollars of damage to Georgia communities. Even winter storms, which used to be rare here in the Deep South, are happening more frequently. Yet the fantasy-based legislators still consider this dire situation a "hoax."

Our monopoly electrical utility is now also our monopoly gas utility, while most home roofs are barren of the solar panels and backup batteries that are becoming more and more affordable. Even homeowners who become energy independent through solar panels are unable to get credit for excess electricity they generate and send back to the grid because lawmakers refused to address Georgia Power's arbitrary cap on the number of homes eligible for this arrangement.

Meanwhile, the refusal of the state government to expand access to mass transit across the state and its continued financial punishment of purchasers of electric vehicles continues to expose lawmakers' 20th-Century mindset when we need to be preparing our state for a new transportation future.

May and November once again provide the only opportunity to stop the madness. This year's election gives Georgians (at the very least) the opportunity to cull those from elective office who lack the basic comprehension of the social compact and proper stewardship of public natural resources. It is of critical interest to everyone in this state to send those horrible examples of failed elected leadership back to whatever useful work they might be capable of rendering. Taking the steps to re-evaluate the concept of leadership is the responsibility of all Georgia voters. It is imperative to improve the quality of legislative and statewide representation up and down the ballot.

As always, the Georgia Chapter's Political Committee will be doing our best to honor our assigned task of selecting the candidates most committed to our goals and policies. We will make our choices available to all Georgia Chapter members, supporters, and, as allowed, the general public. When the work of selecting endorsed candidates is completed and publicized, I implore everyone to do what you can to help elect better quality leaders. Start with discussing the situation with your friends and neighbors. It might seem obvious, but arming members of your community with reality-based information puts us in a strong position, and there are still many among us who are so busy with life they don't make many voting decisions until they are in the booth.

Next, if the importance of electing reality-based

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leadership resonates with you and you have time, talents, or finances to give, reach out and do so. There will always be phone banking, virtual “Zoom Banking,” and (hopefully) in-person canvassing opportunities this year. Any time there is an election, there is ALWAYS an opportunity to help fund the campaigns of candidates you believe in! We may not have the Koch Brothers’ level of campaign cash to throw around, but small contributions in large numbers can and will make a difference. If you can afford a donation of any size to a candidate (or to the Georgia Sierra Club PAC if you don’t want to directly contribute to a candidate) it might be more important than ever before to do so.

The old saw about “getting the government we deserve” doesn’t really hold any more. Georgians don’t in any way deserve the leadership vacuum that hovers like a dark and fetid cloud over our state. If you believe we have a chance to make our climate better and protect our precious air, soil, and water then this is the year to step into the light and make a difference.

I’m not convinced it can’t get any worse.

2022 ELECTION KEY DATES

April 25: Voter registration deadline for the May 24 primary elections.

May 24: General primary elections

June 21: General primary runoffs (where needed)

October 11: Voter registration deadline for the November general election

November 8: General election

December 6: General election runoffs (where needed)

.....

Register to vote, check your registration, find your polling place, check sample ballots, and more at the Georgia Secretary of State's My Voter Page at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov>.

READY FOR 100 CAMPAIGN

Ready for clean energy across Georgia!

BY SCOTT PRESSON, READY FOR 100 TEAM LEADER, & JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

In addition to advocating for clean energy at the state level, the Chapter is continuing to work with communities across the state in accelerating clean energy at the local level. This includes supporting clean energy in Decatur, DeKalb, Atlanta, Savannah, Athens-Clarke County, Clarkston, Augusta-Richmond County, and Gwinnett County.

This past February, Sierra Club



Clean energy activists march in Decatur's Mead Road Mardi Gras Parade in February.

teamed up with the citizen's group Decatur Cares About Climate to participate in the Mead Road Mardi Gras parade. Joined by Commissioner George Dewsberry, 20 activists in the “Climate Krewe” stopped along the path and talked with neighbors about lowering their carbon footprint, the impacts of climate

change, and other important issues.

Decatur Cares About Climate brings together residents of Decatur and surrounding areas to challenge them to learn, advocate, and get involved in climate activism. So far, there are over 100 community members participating in the challenge monthly, and we

want you to join us! Advocates of this group have successfully pushed for clean energy in every level of Decatur's city planning process, and the city is nearing its end for completing a plan for increasing its reliance on clean energy.

Decatur isn't the only metro Atlanta community making moves on clean energy! In December of 2021, DeKalb County passed a resolution to transition to 100% clean energy in county facilities by 2025 and 100% community wide by 2035. Ted Terry, DeKalb Commissioner and former Georgia Chapter Director, was instrumental in gaining approval. DeKalb

county is the sixth local government to make a commitment to clean energy in Georgia. We are looking for residents of DeKalb County to organize to hold the county accountable for their commitments to clean energy. If you're interested in this opportunity, reach out to Georgia Chapter Organizer Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org.

In Gwinnett County, we are working with other partner groups and volunteers to urge the county to establish an Office of Sustainability, including a petition drive. Efforts continue to give input to the Gwinnett County Commissioners

and the County Sustainability Commission. We are looking for volunteers throughout the county to help us in this effort. Contact Chapter Organizer Angela Jiang at angela.jiang@sierraclub.org Ready For 100 Team Leader Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com.

A big congratulations to the city of Savannah and their Office of Sustainability for completing their 100% Savannah Clean Energy Plan with Council approval on December 21, 2021. This comes after the city made a formal commitment in March of 2020. You can view the plan at bit.ly/Savannah-100-Plan.

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TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Transportation & transit are always on the ballot

BY TEJAS KOTAK, CHAIR, TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

We are fast approaching another election season with the Georgia primaries coming up this spring, which will lead to a fast several months until the November midterm elections. Transportation is always on the ballot with the people we elect. Look into the transportation policies of the people running for your city, county, or state office to see if they align with Georgia's climate needs.

Additionally, some important tax referenda in metro Atlanta will include the City of Atlanta T-SPLOST renewal vote to fund local projects in May, and the potential for a transit vote in Cobb County that would add frequent bus lines and possibly a MARTA train into the county. It will be very important for citizens to review these various tax votes to assess whether they:

1. Like the project lists and priorities of their governments;
2. Trust their governments to use the money wisely;
3. See projects that will address climate change and increase equity; and
4. Believe in the long-term investments of good transportation infrastructure

Good projects to look for include transit, trails,

sidewalks, bike lanes, and repair of existing roads. Be very skeptical of building new roads or adding lanes as those projects are extremely expensive and will only increase traffic in a few years time.

Some excellent news out of Washington, DC, are the local projects our House and Senate members were able to secure for us in the budget bill that was passed in mid-March. These include money to study an Atlanta-Savannah train line, improvements to MARTA's Brookhaven station, funds for Valdosta's transit system, and money for the Atlanta Beltline's expansion. This came down to work by Sens. Ossoff and Warnock and Rep. McBath. Our elections matter, so keep in mind the important work our Senators and House members are doing for Georgia when you go vote in the Spring primaries and later this year in November.

LEADERSHIP POSITION OPEN

The Transportation Committee is looking for a new Chair to lead the group. There will be a transition period with the current leader to ensure knowledge transfer and prepare us for the exciting years ahead. You may be a good fit if you:

- Are a current transit rider
- Get excited about the bus showing up on time
- Like reading and chatting about good transportation policy

Please contact Tejas Kotak at tkotak013@gmail.com if you are interested in this role. Read more about the position at bit.ly/Transportation-Chair.

Voters ground Spaceport project

BY DEBBY LIGHTFOOT,
CUMBERLAND ISLAND ISSUE
LEADER

On March 8, 2022, residents of Camden County went to the polls to vote on a resolution that would determine whether Camden County officials could purchase approximately 4,000 acres of badly contaminated land from Union Carbide, where county commissioners planned to construct Spaceport Camden, a rocket launching facility.

Camden County Commissioners have spent the past seven years and over \$10 million in its efforts to build a rocket launching facility in Woodbine, Georgia, just inland from Cumberland Island. After years of reviews, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) granted the County an operator's license in December 2021, which would allow multiple rockets to be launched annually. Cumberland Island is Camden County's most popular tourist destination, but launching rockets from a nearby spaceport would certainly threaten the island as well as other coastal resources.

With these threats in mind, we alerted 179 Sierra Club supporters in Camden County about the election recommending everyone vote "Yes" to repeal the resolution. We outlined the following specific threats and concerns a spaceport presented to demonstrate why it was important to repeal the resolution:

- **Toxic waste:** Camden County taxpayers will pay to own the heavily contaminated site, a

- result of decades of pollution.
- **Risk of failure:** A rocket launch failure could cause falling debris, chemical spills and fire. Due to the remote location of Cumberland Island, hazards could not be easily contained.
- **Burdening future generations:** County ownership means that future Camden County Residents will be responsible for the additional associated costs.
- **Empty promises:** Proponents of Spaceport Camden want you to believe that the Spaceport will bring new economic benefits to Camden County, but the reality is only 0.1% of total investment already has gone to Camden County businesses.
- **Threat to wildlife and wild places:** The Spaceport puts our wildlife and wild places in jeopardy. Spaceport operations will disturb the internationally renowned wildlife and wild places of coastal Georgia—including sea turtles, endangered and protected

birds, and the critically-endangered right whales.

- **Threat to water:** The Spaceport threatens the Satilla River for drinking supply and recreation. Operations require a great deal of water.

On March 8th, 5,779 residents of Camden County went to the polls and voted overwhelmingly to repeal the resolution thus stopping Spaceport Camden for now: 4,168 people voted to repeal (72%) and 1,611 voted against repeal (28%). County officials immediately sought to appeal the outcome of the election by stopping the certification of the results; however, the Georgia Supreme Court refused to interfere with the certification.

We anticipate the county will attempt to pursue other measures to proceed with building its spaceport, but for now, the county has been stopped from purchasing the land it needs to build the spaceport. We will be monitoring the situation closely.

Support Your Passion for a Just and Sustainable World

Create a legacy that protects and restores the natural world for future generations by naming Sierra Club's Georgia Chapter in your will or trust. Or, name Sierra Club Foundation as the beneficiary of your retirement plan for the benefit of your local chapter and leave less highly taxed assets to your loved ones.



To learn more about the advantages of making a planned gift and to become a member of the Rachel Carson Society, please contact us.



SIERRA CLUB
GEORGIA CHAPTER

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SPRING 2022 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

WE'RE PROUD TO BE 30!

The Centennial Group of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter turns 30 years old this year! We are taking a little time to review, document, and share some of our history and to plan some special celebratory activities and outings, hopefully in the fall. We will have more to share with you in the next few weeks and months about our plans, and we will certainly invite you to join us for our 30-Year Anniversary Celebration. Please let us know if you can help us with this project or if you have meaningful stories, documents, photos, or party-planning skills to share. Thank you.

WISHING YOU A HAPPY (AND MEANINGFUL) EARTH MONTH

The Centennial Group hopes to host and participate in several tabling events this spring and would welcome your help. Contact Lynn Walston for details. We are ramping up our spring outings and look forward to hosting an Outing Leader Workshop on April 23rd for new and aspiring outing leaders. For more info, see page 9.



Sierrans pose for a photo after hiking from Amicalola Falls to the Len Foote Hike Inn (left). Bettye Harris and Laura Breyfogle smile for the camera during a recent outing to the Okefenokee Swamp (right).

In the political/legislative arena, several Centennial Group folks participated in "citizen lobbying" of our legislators last month. We also expect a busy and challenging April and May as we prepare to vote in a special April election (HD 45) and in the May 24th Primary Elections (included are several local Cityhood initiatives on the ballot). Linda Bell (elbell51@yahoo.com) leads our group's Political/Legislative Committees and needs lots of help now with voter education, recruitment, registration, and 'get-out-the-vote' efforts. In the summer/fall, Linda needs assistance fielding candidates for future interviews and endorsements.

JUNETEENTH FESTIVAL COMING SOON

We anticipate with excitement our participation (for our 7th year) in Cobb NAACP Annual Juneteen Festival, June 17th-19th, on the Square in Marietta. We will have a booth and table with lots of opportunities to introduce ourselves and our programs to the public, as well as opportunities to learn about & meet other relevant groups and initiatives. It's one of the best festivals in our area, and we're proud to share and support this tradition. Contact Bettye Harris (bettyeharris@gmail.com) to join us. Volunteers needed.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial

Facebook: facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club

MeetUp: meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club



Photos courtesy of the Centennial Group

GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

BY CURT THOMPSON, CHAIR, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP, & **SCOTT PRESSON**, EXCOM MEMBER, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

Earth Day will soon be upon us. Each year, Earth Day is feeling more urgent as reports from climate science groups continue to conclude that we are not transitioning to clean, renewable energy and taking other sustainability practices quickly enough.

Our group will have a tabling event on Friday, April 22, at the Mall of Georgia from 2 to 5 pm. Stop by and say hello or volunteer to join us. Contact Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com if you are interested.

The Greater Gwinnett Group is leading local efforts to transition our county and its cities to 100 percent clean, renewable energy as part of broader sustainability efforts. The Ready for 100% Gwinnett partners are meeting regularly to build community

support. We have a petition out to encourage Gwinnett County to create an Office of Sustainability to compliment their Sustainability Commission, which is an all-volunteer advisory group. To sign on to our letter, go to bit.ly/Gwinnett-Sustainability. We also seek to secure county and city development of clean energy action plans and sustainability plans, similar to efforts in over 180 cities and counties in the US, including in Georgia: Atlanta, Athens-Clarke County, Augusta-Richmond County, Clarkston, Decatur, DeKalb County, and Savannah.

If you are interested in joining our efforts, contact Angela Jiang (angela.jiang@sierraclub.org) or Scott Presson (spress51@gmail.com).

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett

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

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

LAGRANGE GROUP

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

BY MARY LOU DABBS, CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP

The LaGrange Group is heartened by the seemingly reduced risks posed by COVID-19 of late and is planning accordingly. Our monthly Zoom meetings will continue with the goal of developing hybrid Zoom/in-person meetings as soon as possible in compliance with Chapter policy. Recent general meeting topics, often in collaboration with other Groups, have included highlights of our local Bluebird project, a program about a stream restoration project, and a Georgia legislative update. Planned meeting topics for this Spring include a presentation about the Newman Wetlands Center, and a program about Permaculture.

Our outings have continued recently with hikes to Wolfden, Standing Boy Creek, Dowdell Knob, and Sprewell Bluff trails, and our outings leader has helped support a Chapter outing at Sweetwater Creek State Park. Group outings for this spring include Smith Mountain Firetower trail and a garden tour as well as an outing in collaboration with the Georgia Chapter to the Okefenokee Swamp and Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park. Be sure

to monitor the LaGrange Group Facebook page (see link at end of this report) and/or the Georgia Chapter calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar) to find detailed information about these outings. Links are provided to sign up for the outings, get confirmation of participation, and be emailed updates of plan changes. Get out and explore!

The Group is ramping-up our local wildlife habitat enhancement efforts along local trails and in area parks with ongoing bluebird and pollinator projects. We've continued to remain active in the Chapter-driven legislative liaison process through this current legislative session. Plans for public relations efforts include tabling at the local Ag Extension Center Spring Fair and the Hillside Neighborhood Festival in LaGrange and at the One CSU sustainability fair at Columbus State University. Plans are also in the works for a local organic garden tour.

We'd love to have you join us for our programs and outings. Hope to meet you soon!

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange

Facebook: facebook.com/groups/300840033370271

METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

GROUP MEETINGS

We have continued to hold group meetings online only with the option to call in from a phone line or participate from a computer or smartphone. Whether you're new to the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter or if you've been a member for years, in metro Atlanta or well outside it, you're invited to our next group meeting!

We joined up with other local Sierra Club groups for multi-group meetings in January for a year-end review and 2022 kickoff, as well as in February for the ever-popular and informative annual state legislative update.

In March, we invited Daniel Ballard, founder of Convivial Landscapes, to speak with us about landscaping and ecology. Mr. Ballard's presentation and the ensuing Q&A offered an engaging mix of concepts and practical advice regarding why and how to use landscaping and gardening practices to support biodiversity.

A playlist of video recordings of MAG-hosted meetings is now available online at bit.ly/MAG-Playlist. (Time-saving tip: try skipping ahead to featured speakers' presentations and/or listen to the videos at 1.25x speed.)

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

MARTA Bus Network Redesign Meetings & A

Survey: MARTA is seeking input on a bus network redesign through public meetings and a survey. Per a news release, MARTA will "solicit feedback on imagined scenarios that will ultimately inform a redesign of its bus network. MARTA riders and potential customers will be asked if they prefer to have buses arrive more frequently on fewer routes or serve more routes with less frequent arrivals." While this is not the choice we should have to be facing, in the meantime you can find out more and send in your feedback at MARTA2040NextGenBus.com.

South River Forest: There's a new call for a week of action on May 8-15, as part of the work to prevent destruction of the South River Forest, which is still under threat from the Atlanta Police Foundation's proposed facility and the Blackhall movie studio land

swap with DeKalb County. (Check out Defend the Atlanta Forest's Twitter page at twitter.com/defendATLforest for more info on the week of action).

For more context on the Atlanta Police Foundation lease situation:

- The APF has already damaged trees and disturbed soil in the forest in order to conduct soil testing. As of March 14, 2022, APF is still in process of acquiring permits from DeKalb County for construction, which they aim to begin in fall 2022.
- The lease of 381 acres of land to the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) for their facility can still be canceled by the Atlanta city government with 180 days' notice to the APF.
- Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's then-chair Daniel Blackman made a statement against the lease in September 2021 (visit sierraclub.org/georgia/pressreleases to find Blackman's statement).
- Recommended reading: Mainline Zine (mainlinezine.com/tag/stopcopcity) and Saporta Report (saportareport.com/tag/atlanta-prison-farm) for reporting on issues surrounding the lease and proposed APF facility, and Atlanta Community Press Collective articles (atlpresscollective.com) on the history of the land under lease to APF.

Atlanta city tree ordinance: City in the Forest (cityintheforest.org) is calling on supporters of a strong update to the Atlanta Tree Ordinance to contact Atlanta city council in support of the "citizens' blended draft" tree ordinance and to sign up for action alerts on their website.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Want to pitch in by helping out at meetings, planning events or actions, or keeping on top of local policies, politics, 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 zipcode.

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

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

issues. Some months we do not hold a regular meeting, so please check the Chapter calendar, our web-page, and our Facebook page for updates.

Our executive committee meetings are open and generally held on the evening of the first Tuesday of the month. Contact Nina Dutton (nddutton@gmail.com)

to confirm details.

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GROUP INFORMATION

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

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SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

Earth Day in America has been celebrated annually since April 22, 1970, and pre-COVID, the Savannah River Group participated in local Earth Day events in both Georgia and South Carolina. The good news is that, this year, we will be joining in local Earth Day events again – YEAH!!

On Saturday, April 23, 2022, at Phinizy Swamp Nature Park in Augusta as part of Earth Day Augusta (earthdayaugusta.org), we'll be doing the following:

- 9 am - Meet at the Mayor's Pond and do a cleanup;
- 10 am to 3 pm - Staff a booth to distribute Sierra Club literature and information and play the Eco Wheel game;
- 10 am and throughout the day - A member will lead tours of the Park.
- 11:30 am and 1:30 pm - A member will lead bike rides. Helmets are required for the bike tours and riders should bring their own bicycles but a few will be available to rent at the Park.



Savannah River Group members prepare to embark on a tour of Phinizy Swamp Nature Park in Augusta in 2014.

Come join us in some or all of these events. For more information or to volunteer with SRG at these events, contact Sam Booher at 706-772-0840.

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GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River
Facebook: facebook.com/groups/241982449162866

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SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER DIRECTORY

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

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2022 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.

Upcoming ExCom meeting dates:

- Saturday, May 21, 10 AM
- Saturday, July 16, 10 AM
- Saturday, September 17, 10 AM
- Saturday, November 19, 10 AM

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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