

# GEORGIA



# SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • JULY / AUG / SEPT 2020



**INSIDE: THE MOST IMPORTANT ELECTION OF OUR LIVES**

**PLUS** GA LEGISLATURE WRAP-UP • COAL-FIRED PLANT NEAR MACON TO RETIRE ONE IF ITS UNITS  
RIP JOHN SWEET • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS • AND MORE

## FROM THE CHAPTER CHAIR

Bobby Kennedy famously remarked on the curse of experiencing history. In 1966, he said: "Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history."

Like the 1960s, 2020 is certainly interesting. It is also exhausting.

It wasn't so long ago when sitting with friends over lunch was utterly banal. Now that same act is either perverse, rebellious, or thrill-seeking behavior, depending on who you ask. The pandemic tripped up nearly everything in our lives. Plans and schedules first, then vacations and jobs, and for too many, the health of someone we love. Eventually, it shook our basic belief in tomorrow. The future is coming, but we can't tell what it will look like anymore.

But as we all know, the pandemic isn't the only thing slapping us around. We've been living in Donald Trump's America for years now. For me, that never seems normal, and it certainly isn't comfortable. I had believed that the Constitution was a pretty robust document and that the norms of our representative democracy were rock solid. I've found out differently. It turns out that lying and shamelessness can undermine foundational pieces of our world. You know, things like science and reason, along with decency and accountability and the notion I had that if you give someone a big job, they will at least try to be competent and do the right thing.

And now, in case we all weren't



JEFF SCHOENBERG

uncomfortable enough, the horror of systemic racism and violence in our midst is now fully on display. Recent events make it simply impossible to ignore the injustice that lies at the heart of our society. The grotesque image of a policeman kneeling on the

neck of a Black man galvanized our nation to action. Only the most callous fail to see that the resistance in the street is a fight we all must join because we all must change. The call of Black Lives Matter is a wake-up call to every one of us to end the systems of

oppression that unfairly reward some of us and punish others.

The call of this movement is to fix what ails our nation. We are failing to live up to our founding promise. We proclaim that every person is deserving of equal respect, equal opportunity, and equal protection under the law. The demand of our day is that we must make this promise real.

That is a lot. And all at once. It is more than most of us know what to do with.

So, what do I think you should do? My advice is to remember a stupid dad joke and get to work.

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

In my role as Chapter Chair, I am trying to remember that the problems that brought me to this position are still waiting to be solved.

The 2020 election is still coming. The need to get good people

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### On the Cover

Photo: Members of the Georgia Chapter's Centennial Group march during the Cobb County NAACP's Juneteenth Justice Rally & March in Marietta on June 19.

## IN THIS ISSUE

*Chapter News* • Page 3

*Election 2020 Preview* • Page 4

*Issue Committee Updates* • Pages 7-12

*Remembering John Sweet* • Page 13

*Group News* • Pages 16-21

*Directory* • Pages 22-23

**CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE**



into office has never been clearer. Political work still matters.

Climate change is still looming. The need to transform our society to protect our future is still existentially important. Clean energy work still matters.

The environmental justice movement has always been about lifting the burden of bad environmental policy off the necks of those with the least power in our society. That work dovetails exactly with today's protests. It has never mattered more.

So my advice to you is to respond to today with a single act to fight for something you care about. Pick

up a pen, or a telephone, or grab a banner and march. Once you start working, you'll find that it isn't quite so daunting to do the next thing that needs to be done.

Look, these are challenging times, not least because the work that is upon us isn't just about making the world better, it is also about making ourselves better. There's nothing harder than that. But nothing will get better until we all put our shoulders to the task and push in the same direction. Please, gather your courage and get up and start pushing.

*Jeff Schoenberg*  
GEORGIA CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR

CHAPTER NEWS

LATEST UPDATES ON OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

We hope this issue finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to change our way of life in the U.S., and many states, including Georgia, have seen increasing case numbers.

Georgia Chapter staff have been working from home since March and will continue to do so indefinitely. Our Chapter's office in Decatur remains closed, and we are holding all events and meetings virtually. All outings are on hold until further notice.

We encourage all our members to exercise the upmost caution as our state continues to deal with this pandemic. Wear masks in public, practice physical distancing, wash your hands regularly, and stay home as much as possible.

For the latest on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and links to many available community resources, visit [sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates).

GET INVOLVED IN ATLANTA ICO!

Are you familiar with our Atlanta ICO program? Since 1988, Atlanta Inspiring Connections Outdoors has worked with local youth groups in the metro Atlanta area to organize outings for young people who may not have had a chance to experience the beauty of our wild places.

Led by volunteer leader Terri Lyde, the Atlanta ICO program aims to inspire young people and foster within them an appreciation for nature, not to mention give them the skills to enjoy wild places safely. Past outings have included backpacking on Cumberland Island, snorkeling with manatees in Crystal River, Florida, working on community service projects in the Atlanta area, and more!

The program is 100 percent volunteer-led. Sierra Club outings are on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but volunteers with the Atlanta ICO program are working with national Sierra Club staff to ensure the health and safety of everyone on future outings as well as having discussions about creating a more just and equitable outdoors for all.

If you're interested in getting involved, send an email to [AtlantalCO@gmail.com](mailto:AtlantalCO@gmail.com).

JOIN THE GA CHAPTER'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter Nominating Committee is seeking candidates for the Chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom). Chapter ExCom has oversight responsibility for the Georgia Chapter to ensure that it is carrying out our mission productively. The responsibilities of ExCom can be reviewed on the Chapter website ([sierraclub.org/georgia/excom](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/excom)).

If you know someone who would be a good ExCom member, or if you are interested in serving yourself, contact Jeff Schoenberg at [schoenbergjhe@gmail.com](mailto:schoenbergjhe@gmail.com).

Chapter and Group ExCom candidate statements and any nomination petitions for candidates must be submitted by September 21, 2020.

Complete rules for the election can be found at [sierraclub.org/georgia/ExComElections2020](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/ExComElections2020). Ballots with candidate statements will be distributed by mail and electronically by October 20, 2020. Ballots must be returned to the Georgia Chapter by 5 p.m., November 20, 2020.

Details for returning ballots and ballot counting will be published on the Chapter website and in the next Sierran.

# Most Important Election Ever?

*It's been said before, but given the threats we face this year, the 2020 Election may take that title*

BY EDDIE EHLERT, CHAIR,  
POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Since at least the late 1960s, one election or another has been referred to as “the most important ever.” Often single issues or major concerns that were suggested to tear the fabric of society were at the forefront, and Americans were called upon to vote and stave off some sort of impending doom. Though repeated often, the accumulation of threats both foreign and domestic faced by the electorate this year may finally qualify the 2020 Election as The Most Important Ever.

While the threats we Americans and Georgians face this year range from an unrepentant pandemic causing a change in how we humans interact to the focus by one party to close the Post Office, environmental issues are under greater duress than they have been in 50 years. There has always been a problem of inadequate funding for environmental oversight and remediation. Resistance from polluters to improve their practices and procedures has always been present. On issues such as climate change, the opposition has ranged from ambivalence to active delusion among the “denialists.”

Yet now we face a wholesale active threat to carefully negotiated regulations supported by scientific evaluation that produce clear, long-term benefits to the world and her creatures. Laws, regulations, best practices, treaties, and negotiated settlements are being cast to the

wind for no better reason than executive arrogance and power. This current administration has actively pursued rollbacks on the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Parks funding, National Monument protection, clean energy development, fossil fuels dependency reduction, wetlands protection, river and stream protection — **in short, every core issue of the Sierra Club!**

But wait, there's more! A better poster child for impeding everything we have come to recognize as necessary for protecting and enhancing equity and inclusion could not have been intentionally designed! We have never suffered through an administration so focused on nothing but the protection of “private property” at the expense of everything else in the country.

While such anti-environmental (and anti-human) behavior has been occurring, the state of Georgia has been refocusing efforts on voter suppression to the greatest extent since the Supreme Court removed us from “pre-clearance” under the Voting Rights Act. From the unnecessary “voter purges” to saddling the taxpayers with a wholly inefficient \$100 million voting “system” to strict voter ID and signature matching policies, the necessary effort to cast a ballot has never been more difficult.

**Except when we make use of Georgia's vote by mail system,** which we are lucky to still have in this state. Georgia allows any

eligible voter to request an absentee ballot without needing to provide an excuse or a reason (some states require you to swear you are ill or you are going to be out of the country, for example).

The COVID-19 crisis led the Secretary of State to enhance absentee ballot availability by sending every registered voter an absentee ballot application. I sent it back, got my ballot, returned it, tracked it, and know that it counted! It is EASY!

More than a million Georgians did the same for June's election.

Aside from a few runoffs scattered across the state, the next chance to vote will be in the General Election in November. It is a pretty sure bet that we will still be mired in the COVID-19 crisis in November. It is also very likely that the problems causing long lines, inadequate numbers of machines and staff, and generally excessive waits to vote in person will remain in November.

Today, voting in person poses serious health risks as we clearly do not have “best practices” in place to ensure voters are safe when casting a ballot. For June's election, in person voters stood in line for hours in close proximity to dozens of their neighbors (some wearing masks, some not) and cast their ballots on touch-screen machines that have been touched by many, many others.

Obviously, the potential to contract COVID-19 is not a problem limited



to Georgia's polling places, but the ability of all voters to ask for absentee ballots makes it a problem Georgians can avoid.

Adding it all up, this is a time in history where Georgia environmental voters have the responsibility to **REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT** as soon as the results for the runoff are counted.

Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger has already said he doesn't plan on sending absentee ballot applications to all eligible voters for the General Election the way the state did for the Primary Election. Raffensperger has told the press he plans to set up a website where voters can ask for an absentee ballot, but as of early July, no such website exists yet.

More details can be found in the "Election FAQ" story at right, but to request an absentee ballot, an eligible voter must fill out an application requesting the ballot, get the application to their county election office, and wait for the ballot to arrive in the mail.

When you receive your ballot, it should come with instructions about how to fill it out and return it. However, some of the language in the instructions might be unclear or vague. The ACLU of Georgia has put together helpful guides on how to properly fill out your ballot and your ballot request application to ensure both are properly handled by elections officials ([acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020](https://acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020)).

Having the absentee ballot on hand gives you time to research candidates and races you might not be clear on. Be sure to turn in your ballot early! Mail it or put it in a drop-off box where available as soon as you can. It takes time for a ballot to make its way through the mail, and you want to leave plenty of time to

## ABSENTEE BALLOT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What are the key dates for this election?

August 11, 2020 - Scheduled runoffs from the June Primary Election

October 5, 2020 - Deadline to be registered to vote in the General Election

**November 3, 2020 - ELECTION DAY**

December 1, 2020 - Scheduled date for runoffs for state and local offices

January 5, 2021 - Scheduled date for runoffs for federal offices

### How do I check my voter registration?

Go to the state's My Voter Page website at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](https://mvp.sos.ga.gov) to check or update your voter registration. Given Georgia's history with purging voter rolls, it's a good idea to check your registration regularly. To register to vote for the first time, you can go to [registertovote.sos.ga.gov](https://registertovote.sos.ga.gov). Many local government facilities (county election offices, public libraries, etc.) have paper voter registration forms on hand, but be sure to check their hours as some government facilities have closed or have reduced hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### What is an absentee ballot?

An absentee ballot is a paper ballot sent to voters to fill out and return by mail. Any eligible voter in Georgia can ask for one without needing to provide a reason or excuse why they can't vote in person.

### How do I get an absentee ballot?

Eligible voters must fill out an absentee ballot application and send it to their county's election officials. Go to [sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/absentee\\_voting\\_in\\_georgia](https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/absentee_voting_in_georgia) to find the absentee ballot application and a link to locate your local elections office. The ballot application can be printed and mailed to your local elections office or, in some locations, emailed to your elections officials. The ACLU of Georgia ([acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020](https://acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020)) has some helpful guides for submitting your absentee ballot application.

### Do I need to send in a new absentee ballot application if I voted absentee in the June Primary Election?

YES! Voting absentee in one election does not mean the state will automatically send you absentee ballots for future elections. There are some exceptions for senior citizens and disabled voters, but for the most part, a new application is required each new election.

### When am I allowed to ask for an absentee ballot?

Right now! The state allows voters to ask for a ballot up to 180 days before an election, which means ballot applications are being accepted now. However, if there is a runoff election taking place in your area on August 11, it is a good idea to wait until those races are finalized before asking for a ballot.

### How do I return an absentee ballot?

You can either return it by mail (requires stamps) or drop it off in person at your local elections office. If you are returning it by mail, be sure to send in your ballot as early as possible to allow time for it to be delivered and counted before Election Day. Some county elections officials have set up secure ballot drop boxes for voters to turn in their ballots. Again, the ACLU of Georgia ([acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020](https://acluga.org/en/voting-and-elections-2020)) has a great guide for filling out and returning an absentee ballot.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

address any issues (ballot lost in mail, rejected for some reason, etc.) that might come up.

After you have returned it, you can go to the My Voter Page at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov) and track whether the ballot has been received and accepted. If they don't have it by Election Day, go to the polls and

vote with a Provisional Ballot. You may wonder who to vote for and who supports our goals? As always, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter has a developing list of environmental champions dedicated to protecting our land, air, and water. The list of endorsed candidates is accessible through the Chapter website and will be regularly updated as worthy

candidates are endorsed. Then on Election Day, take it easy! Just wait for the returns to come in and know you have done your part.

Whether it is a cliché or not, this may very well be the Most Important Election Ever for environmental voters! Vote and make your voice count!

## KEY RACE ALERT: THE GEORGIA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Below the races for President, Senate, and Congress on your ballot in November, you will find candidates running for seats on the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC). The campaign for the PSC doesn't draw nearly the amount of attention as the other contests on the ballot, but the results of those races have an outsized impact on the lives of Georgians.

Here are the basics: The Georgia PSC regulates utilities in this state, including electric, telecom and fracked gas companies. It is a five-member body elected to provide oversight of these industries and are meant to protect the public's interest. The commission's members are elected in partisan elections to serve staggered six-year terms. Though commissioners are elected in statewide elections (you will have more than one PSC race on your ballot), each commissioner represents a specific area of Georgia.

As you might expect, much of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's clean energy work depends on the decisions made by the PSC.

For example, in 2019, Georgia Power submitted an update to its long-term energy plan, known as its Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). It is required to up-

date this plan every three years and get it approved by the PSC. This plan dictates how much electricity Georgia Power plans to generate at coal-fired power plants, how much new solar and wind energy capacity will come online in the next three years, and more.

Also in 2019, the Georgia PSC voted to allow Georgia Power to raise the rates it charges its customers. And earlier this summer, the PSC approved giving utilities permission to resume shutting off Georgians' power if they fall behind on their bills despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, but certainly not least, it is the Georgia PSC that continues to allow Georgia Power to move forward with its planned expansions at the Plant Vogtle nuclear plant, which is billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule, as well as the company's plan to pass much of those costs onto our bills.

So if we want more clean energy in Georgia, if we want to be charged a reasonable price for electricity in Georgia, and if we want humane and equitable energy policies, who we choose to represent us on the PSC is hugely important.

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# Juliette's Plant Scherer, largest coal plant in U.S., to retire one of its four units

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

In late June, it was announced that one of the four units at the coal-fired Plant Scherer, just outside of Macon in Juliette, Georgia, will be shut down, marking a major milestone in our efforts to replace coal-generated electricity with clean energy.

Plant Scherer is the largest coal plant in the U.S. and regularly tops the list of America's largest carbon emitters. Each one of its units produces nearly 900 megawatts of energy.

Although the plant is operated by Georgia Power, Plant Scherer's Unit 4 is jointly owned by two Florida-based utilities: Florida Power & Light (FPL) and the city-owned utility of the city of Jacksonville, known as JEA. FPL, which is owned by Florida utility giant NextEra, announced it would retire its ownership stake, and JEA followed suit in June.

"This is a clarion call that even the nation's biggest and newest coal plants don't make economic sense," said Stephen Stetson, Senior Campaign representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign. "The Florida utilities understood that they needed to be out of Plant Scherer, and now the remaining owners of the plant — Oglethorpe Power, Georgia Power, the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia, and the City of Dalton — need to follow along and retire their interest in dirty coal-fired electricity. This is a perfect opportunity to reinvest in new, sustainable jobs for communities near power plants, and we hope retraining and transition assistance will be prioritized in the coming months."

Due to the plummeting cost of renewables and fracked gas, Scherer Unit 4, which came online in 1989, had become the most expensive unit in JEA's fleet.

"We are happy to see JEA's unanimous decision to divest from the nation's largest coal plant," said Janet Stanko, Chair of Sierra Club's Northeast Florida group. "CEO Paul McElroy recognized that the power from Plant Scherer was the highest cost in the utility's portfolio, a trend that has been happening across the

country. Coal is the dirtiest fuel for electricity generation in pollutants and carbon emissions. We are particularly happy about this decision as the urgency to retire coal rises every day as we deal with the devastating impact of climate change and we are particularly happy to see that there is the option to increase JEA's solar potential as part of the power purchase agreement."

Plant Scherer has long been under investigation for groundwater contamination from toxic coal ash. Earlier this year, residents of Juliette stormed the Georgia statehouse to demand remedies for groundwater contamination.

Toxic coal ash leaches into groundwater, polluting well water, lakes, and rivers used for drinking, fishing, and recreation. The public health risks associated with coal ash are significant and well-documented. Coal ash sites contain some of the most dangerous known toxic chemicals on earth — like arsenic, lead, mercury, and chromium — which raise the risk for cancer, heart disease, and stroke, and can inflict permanent brain damage on children.

It is expected that the Georgia Environmental Protection Division will release draft permits for the closure of the coal ash ponds near Plant Scherer in March 2021, and our Beyond Coal Campaign will continue its work to make sure these coal ash ponds are closed safely. The closure of Scherer Unit 4 means less coal ash production, and despite the unit's retirement, FPL and JEA are still financially responsible for coal ash remediation.

Although Scherer Unit 4 will cease operation on January 1, 2022, Southern Company's subsidiary Georgia Power will continue to burn coal at the other 3 units, totalling 2,673 megawatts of energy. Another Southern Company coal plant in Georgia, Plant Bowen near Cartersville, will surpass Scherer to become the nation's largest coal plant.

The Plant Scherer announcement comes on the heels of the news that plans to build Plant Washington in Sandersville, Georgia — the last remaining proposed coal-fired plant in the U.S. — have officially been abandoned. The end of Plant Washington meant there are no new coal plants planned to be built in the United States!

The Beyond Coal Campaign in Georgia is building momentum! To keep up with the latest on this work, follow the campaign on Facebook at [facebook.com/GABeyondCoal](https://facebook.com/GABeyondCoal).



## READY FOR 100

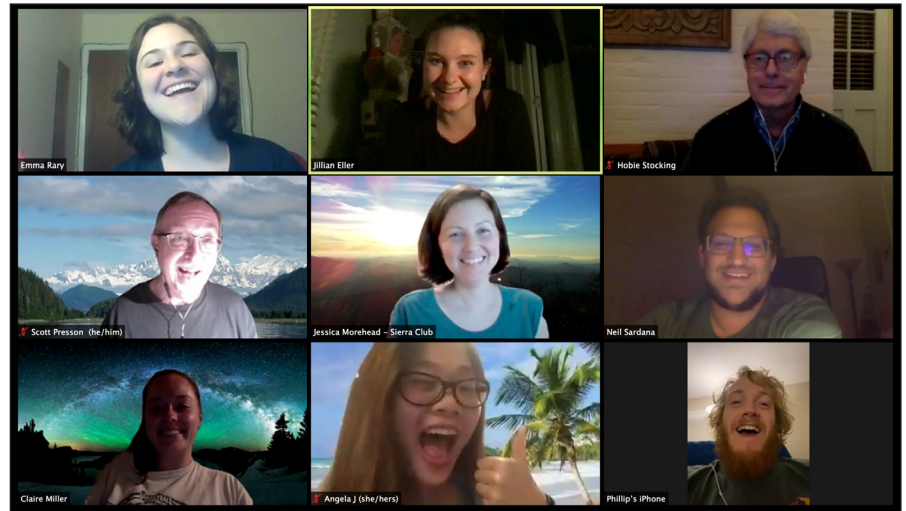
# Get involved in our Clean Energy Committee today!

**JILLIAN ELLER**, CONSERVATION FELLOW, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The Clean Energy Committee is a collaborative organizing, training, and community building space for all clean energy-related and climate justice work in the Georgia Chapter. The committee's efforts include supporting local efforts to push cities and counties to commit to 100 percent clean energy, shutting down coal plants, advocating for energy efficiency in low-income households, and advancing Clean Energy for All.

We meet every third Wednesday of the month from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Please RSVP on the Georgia Chapter's online calendar ([sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar)) to receive virtual login information. Our digest, which contains updates to our campaigns and action steps you can take, can be found at [bit.ly/CEC-Digest](https://bit.ly/CEC-Digest). Follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/GABeyondCoal](https://facebook.com/GABeyondCoal) or join our email list by sending a request to Scott Presson at [spress51@gmail.com](mailto:spress51@gmail.com).

The Clean Energy Committee has shifted away from relying on presentations and updates for the bulk of



The Clean Energy Committee is all smiles during a recent virtual meeting.

our meetings to a focus on an active, supportive space for all clean energy organizing related work where members can immediately take action during meetings. Now more than ever it is important to predicate our organizing work on racial justice.

The Clean Energy Committee asks participants to hold the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing at the heart of their work:

1. Be inclusive
2. Emphasis on bottom-up organizing
3. Let people speak for themselves
4. Work in mutuality and solidarity
5. Build just relationship among ourselves
6. Commitment to self-transformation

Prior attendance or knowledge of clean energy work in Georgia is not

needed to participate. We will send out the Clean Energy digest the day before every meeting to our email list to provide any updates to our campaigns. Activities you can expect at committee meetings include efforts related to partnership or relationships, action on energy or climate issues, training to develop organizing skills, and acts of solidarity with other movements. Interested in volunteering on the Chapter or local level? Contact Jillian Eller at [jillian.eller@sierraclub.org](mailto:jillian.eller@sierraclub.org)

This month, we'd like to highlight the work done in Smyrna and the city's Ready for 100 campaign. Volunteers have been working on a letter to the mayor and public officials stating their goals and pushing for a resolution committing the city to 100% clean energy by 2035. Learn more about this campaign and how you can take action at [bit.ly/SmyrnaRF100](https://bit.ly/SmyrnaRF100).

## LEGISLATIVE

# 2020 Georgia Legislative Session ends after delay

**MARK WOODALL**, CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The Georgia Legislature adjourned for the year on Friday,

June 26. The session was suspended on March 13 for three months due to the coronavirus. Thanks to all who contacted their legislators and thanks to contract lobbyist Neill Herring and intern Liam Torpy. Thanks to Ricky Leroux for critical communications work.

I'm pleased to report that HB 545 — the Georgia Farm Bureau and Georgia Poultry Federation attack on environmental law (nuisance law is the original environmental

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law) — died without a vote in the House on the amended Senate version.

Other bad rollbacks defeated this year included HB 937. The bill was the attempt by the homebuilders, realtors, and chemical companies to preempt local control over single family and duplex design standards. HB 937 was known as Blight Now or PVC Everywhere. One rollback, SB 43, slipped through. That was the Dalton Utilities and Georgia Power effort to take away the vote of the people of Dalton for more Vogtle debt.

Several positive measures passed this session, including bills on ethylene oxide reporting, a ban on burning treated railroad ties for production of electricity, regulation of land application of poultry plant waste and other "soil amendments," the coal ash host fee fix, and Uber fees for transit. The Governor has 40 days to sign, veto or let these bills become law without signature.

Two good constitutional amendments are now headed to the November ballot. One is the trust fund fee fix, and the other is the fix for sovereign immunity so citizens can sue the state for illegal actions.

Several important environmental bills were introduced by Democrats but did not move. Those included requiring coal ash to be stored in lined pits, opening the motor fuel tax to transit, requiring 100% clean electricity, banning single use plastic bags, and stopping the payment of the Vogtle tariff by schools.

## ROLLBACKS SIERRA CLUB OPPOSED

**HB 545** by Rep. Tom McCall (and the Georgia Farm Bureau, Georgia Poultry Federation, and Georgia Agribusiness Council) was an attack on Georgia's

nuisance law. The bill would have made it harder to sue if a giant industrial agricultural operation, like a massive pig farm, moves in next door.

The bill passed the Senate in June after two hours of bitter debate. Senator Karinshak called the bill an "abomination" and said that it was Big Ag selling out the small farmers. That statement was both succinct and deadly accurate.

The good news is that the Senate Judiciary Chair Senator Jesse Stone (R-Waynesboro) passed an amendment to put back in a real two year statute of limitations. The Jesse Stone-William Ligon amendment passed 28-21 with seven Republicans (Greg Dolezal of Cumming, Chuck Hufstetler of Rome, Kay Kirkpatrick of Marietta, William Ligon of Brunswick, PK Martin of Lawrenceville, Jesse Stone of Waynesboro, Lindsey Tippens of Marietta) and all 21 Democrats voting for the amendment.

Unfortunately, the greedy men at the Georgia Farm Bureau, Georgia Poultry Federation, Georgia Cattlemen's Association, and Georgia Agribusiness Council tried to get HB 545 in a Committee of Conference (where law-makers from both chambers work to reconcile different versions of the bill they passed) to put it back closer to the original "Big Ag Abomination" bill. That effort failed.

HB 545 started out exactly the same as the North Carolina bill pushed by pork producers that took away the rights of people living near the massive open lagoons of hog manure to protect their homes. This is a huge environmental justice issue as many communities of color are affected by the terrible odors, polluted well water, flies, and other nuisances.

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Nuisance law is the original environmental law. The current four-year statute of limitations is needed as most people waste two or three years trying to get the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) or the U.S. EPA to do something about the pollution. It takes some time before people realize their only recourse is nuisance law.

**SB 211** by Sen. Tyler Harper is an attack on Beyond Meat and other meat substitutes pushed by the Cattlemen's Association and the Georgia Farm Bureau. The Cattlemen's Association has introduced similar bills trying to change food labeling in more than 25 states. Lobbyists for Impossible Foods and the Grocery Association testified against the bill. After being amended, SB 211 passed as agreed to by the grocery stores and Impossible Foods. You can go to the Plant Based Food Association website for more background.

**HB 906** by Rep. Darlene Taylor would allow the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to sell up to 15 acres of Heritage Trust land to private entities in addition to local governments. The state needs to fund repairs for historic homes, but selling them off is not acceptable. The Gullah-Geechee community, all the historical preservation groups, and former President Jimmy Carter all opposed this measure. Rep. Jesse Petrea says that he and Senator Ben Watson, both from Savannah, killed the bill for this year. Rep. Petrea, a supporter of the DNR, had tried to work out a deal but seems to have found that unattainable and gave up for the session. HB 906 died in the state Senate.

## ENERGY

**SB 123** by Sen. William Ligon fixed the loophole that made it cheaper to store coal ash in local landfills than regular household trash. If the bill is signed by Gov. Kemp, the minimum host fee paid to local governments to store coal ash is now \$2.50, the same fee placed on regular garbage. HB 926, restoring the tire disposal fee to \$1 and restoring other trust fund fees, was added in committee. Passing SB 123 was a Georgia Water Coalition priority. SB 123 passed.

**HB 857** by Rep. Alan Powell bans the burning of treated railroad ties for electricity production. This law is much needed due to problems with two biomass to electricity plants in northeast Georgia. Instead of burning clean wood chips as was promised, there are piles of treated railroad ties being burned in both Madison and Franklin County biomass operations. HB 857 passed.

**SB 43** by Sen. Chuck Payne allows Dalton Utilities to avoid a currently mandated public referendum when it issues bonds. A similar measure failed in 2018. SB 43 passed in June with the minimum 91 voters required

for passage. After failing to get this bill passed in 2018 and 2019, Dalton Utilities hired six lobbyists, including the son of the House Speaker. SB 43 was supported by Georgia Power. While it was claimed that SB 43 was not about Vogtle, open records act investigations revealed emails such as one in which the Dalton Utilities CEO said he didn't want anti-nuke treehuggers opposing a bond referendum.

## LAND/WATER/TOXICS

**SB 426** by Sen. Brian Strickland requires immediate reporting and posting on the EPD website of any releases of ethylene oxide in excess of the permitted level. This bill was greatly improved by pressure from the Cobb County Stop Sterigenics citizens' group, Rep. Erick Allen, Rep. Mary Frances Williams, and others. SB 426 passed.

**SB 384** by Sen. William Ligon protects the Satilla River blackwater corridor. It would stop a mega-landfill proposed for Brantley County. There were objections from the landfill's lobbyist, former EPD Director Jud Turner. SB 384 died in the House Rules Committee due to opposition from the Governor's Office.

**HB 1057** by Rep. Trey Rhodes allows local governments to regulate "soil amendments" after a problem with a court ruling in Oglethorpe County. The dumping of chicken plant sludge, rotten eggs, septage, and other noxious substances by John Hulse and others is a major problem in Elbert County as well as Oglethorpe County. HB 1057 passed.

**HR 1023** by Rep. Andrew Welch is a constitutional amendment that restores the right of the people of Georgia to sue the state government for relief when the state or its agencies break the law.

This so-called "waiver of sovereign immunity" was lost in a Supreme Court case several years ago, and previous remedies have been vetoed by governors. This resolution has now passed both Chambers and will be placed on the ballot in November, along with the Trust in Trust Funds Amendment, also sponsored by Rep. Welch. These are two much-needed reforms.

## FEES

**HR 164** by the late Rep. Jay Powell passed the state Senate on a vote of 53-0 on Day 27, the same version passed by the House. HR 164 now goes on the November ballot. Sierra Club has sought this legislation for at least 16 years. It allows the General Assembly to create and abolish fee-based programs but the funds collected through those fees must be used for the purposes set

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forth in the act creating them. The funds do not “lapse” back into the General Fund if not used during the year they were collected, but remain in the program to fund its operations.

TRANSPORTATION

HB 105 added fees to Uber and other ride-sharing trips



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

Connections between race  
and transit have deep roots

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

The Montgomery Bus Boycott began with Rosa Parks refusing to yield her seat to a white passenger in spite of segregationist laws that required her to do so. The boycott lasted an entire year from December 1955 to December 1956. It led to integration of the bus system and the emergence of Martin Luther King Jr. as a major leader in the Civil Rights Movement.

The moral arc of history was pulled one more notch towards justice, and it started on the bus.

Race and transit have always been thoroughly intertwined, and our state of Georgia has many modern examples. MARTA is primarily funded by the counties it serves, federal dollars, and fares it charges. It is the only major transit system in America without funding from its state. It was not too long ago that state lawmakers scathingly called MARTA “Moving Africans Rapidly Through Atlanta” while refusing it any state funding. Cobb and Gwinnett have long used the coded terminology of “urban crime” as an excuse to not join MARTA or improve their own transit systems. Tides

(\$0.50/ride) and “quasi-dedication” for transit passed and is on the Governor’s desk awaiting signature.

HB 511 started out as a bill to make major changes to rural transit. It was later gutted and amended to move the ATL Board, which governs transit in the metro Atlanta area, from Georgia Regional Transportation Authority to the Georgia Dept. of Transportation. HB 511 passed.

are changing on all these fronts.

There was a push earlier this year in the Statehouse from Senator Sally Harrel and Representative Josh McLaurin to provide state funding to transit, and Gwinnett and Cobb are both more open to expanding transit services due in no small part to both counties becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Gwinnett may have another chance at MARTA this November if its county officials are bold enough to put it on the ballot. These are all positive shifts, but real results have yet to be achieved.

Transit expansion requires hard fought battles for sales tax increases at local levels, but highways and roads can be built with little public engagement. This system exists in no small part because of ingrained racism within our transportation system. Over 70 percent of regular transit riders in the Atlanta region are Black, and those numbers tick closer to 80 percent when looking at riders all across the state. While it is politically easy to expand highways from white suburbs into cities, providing better bus service within a city— let alone sidewalks to get to bus stops — requires years of effort and immense political will.

The coming months and years will see a lot of opportunities to support and advocate for transit issues. These could be those aforementioned sales tax votes, or votes for elected officials at local, state, or federal officials. This November is critical. Look into candidates’ transportation platforms, and make sure that they are equitable. This is one way to be part of seeking justice for the long run. Supporting transit supports Black lives.



WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE

Thanks for your help  
protecting the Okefenokee

BY RICKY LEROUX, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,  
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

For nearly a year now, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter and dozens of allied organizations have been working to

stop a titanium mine proposed for an area right outside the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge.

A bit of history: In July 2019, Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, out of Birmingham, Alabama, filed for a permit to mine about 1,200 acres in an area known as Trail Ridge, which forms a natural dam on the east side of the Okefenokee Swamp. The company abruptly withdrew its application in February after significant public outcry, but filed for a new permit, this time to mine about 900 acres, in March.

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Thanks to public pressure, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is considering the permit, held a virtual public meeting about the proposal in May and, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, extended the comment period for this second permit application by more than six weeks.

The comment period is now closed, and we're waiting for the Corps to make a decision about the permit. Thanks to activists like you, the Sierra Club and our partners were able to generate nearly 60,000 public comments to the Corps about Twin Pines' two applications. We're told that this is an unprecedented number and triple what the Corps typically sees for a permit like this.

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's position is that this permit application should be denied to protect the Okefenokee Swamp, a unique and treasured natural ecosystem. Barring outright denial, the Georgia Chapter has asked the Corps to require a full environmental impact statement (EIS) be conducted before any mining takes place in order to ensure Twin Pines' proposal is impartially scrutinized.

Visit [bit.ly/okefenokee](https://bit.ly/okefenokee) to sign up for our Protect the Okefenokee campaign, and be sure to join the Wildlands & Wildlife Committee email list at [bit.ly/GASC-WILD](https://bit.ly/GASC-WILD) to stay up to date on this issue and other committee action.

## 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.

**Our Funding**

Category	Percentage
Grants & Foundations	40%
Individual Donations	38%
National Funding Allocation	20%
Membership & Other	2%

**Giving In Action**

Category	Percentage
Conservation Programs	90%
Administrative	7%
Fundraising	3%

**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 to 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](https://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: \_\_\_\_\_

## Remembering John Sweet

**MARK WOODALL**, VICE CHAIR, CONSERVATION,  
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Sierra Club lost a great friend with the recent passing of John Sweet. In a long career as a worker's compensation lawyer, John sought justice for his clients, but he also fought for justice in many other ways.

Along with notable Sierran Ogden Doremus, John was a founder of the Georgia Center for Law in the Public Interest. Later known as GreenLaw, the Center had a 25 year run as an important resource for the environmental movement in Georgia. John and Midge Sweet hosted many progressive groups at their office building near the Capitol, including Georgia Conservation Voters and Georgia Airkeepers.

While John only served one term on the Atlanta City Council, he mentored many progressive politicians including John Lewis, Nan Orrock, Mary Margaret Oliver, Stephanie Stuckey, and Stacey Abrams.

John was one of the leaders in the restoration of Inman Park. He and Midge hosted many fundraisers for progressive candidates and causes at their home in Inman Park, including the Sierra Club when Midge served as Vice Chair of the Georgia Chapter.

As a volunteer for the ACLU, John took on Georgia Attorney General Mike Bowers in the famous *Bowers v. Hardwick* case that challenged Georgia's anti-sodomy law. While the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Bowers in a 5-4 vote in 1986, a later 2003 Supreme Court decision finally struck down anti-sodomy laws in Georgia and a dozen other states.

Here are some thoughts from Colleen Kiernan, former director of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, on John Sweet:

I learned this afternoon that a dear friend and mentor, John Sweet, passed away after battling Parkinson's for 15 years. John had a profound impact on my life, and I've been thinking about him a lot lately. I'm grateful for having this afternoon with nothing else I had to do to reflect and write some of my thoughts down:

Oh my heart aches for all the Sweets, especially dear Midge Sweet. I have been thinking a lot lately



John Sweet

*Photo: Legacy.com*

about John, whom I have known all of my adult life. I was the recipient of his generosity in so many ways. Most obviously, there was the office space at 175 Trinity Ave where he loved introducing people to the Georgia Airkeepers. But he was also so generous with his time and expertise in all sorts of other ways. I remember that I got him to walk through a 1920 condo between Ponce and North before I bought it, and he assured me that I was not a kid but a responsible adult and it was a good decision. In 2015, the Sweet's support of Kwanza Hall reinforced my own political instincts, which had a lasting impact and positive effect on my career trajectory. I will miss him, Atlanta will miss him, the world will miss him — but we are all better for knowing his impeccable heart and spirit.

According to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Sweet was a guitarist and singer most of his life.

"Pete Seeger, the songwriter and activist, would overnight with the Sweets when playing in Cincinnati in the 1950s. Beginning in the late 1990s a group of musicians gathered in Sweet's basement on Wednesday nights. Sweet offered them a single implacable edict: You don't have to be any good, but you have to play and sing," Bill Banks writes in the AJC.

Sweet is survived by his Midge Sweet, his wife of 42 years, and their children Cassandra Eterovic (Dalibor) and Eli Sweet (Keke Ren), sister-in-law Christiane French, twin sister, Ann Brubaker (Larry), brother David Sweet (Elaine Kihara) and four grandchildren, according to the AJC.



# CALLING ALL CHANGEMAKERS

## WE'RE MORE POWERFUL TOGETHER, JOIN US!

Amidst multiple intersecting crises, we're re-imagining how we mobilize and engage volunteers – we need your help in building power across the state. Now is the time to come together to support a more just Georgia for our climate and communities.



### CLIMATE VOTERS 2020

vote Georgia green



Join our text + phone banking teams to elect environmental and social justice champions in the Legislature and Congress

Contact  
Tia Fay



[tia.fay@sierraclub.org](mailto:tia.fay@sierraclub.org)

### TRANSIT USER EQUITY

center rider experience



Prioritize the experiences and knowledge of full-time transit users in our upcoming committee work

Contact  
Tejas Kotak



[tkotak013@gmail.com](mailto:tkotak013@gmail.com)

### JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

build community in priority areas



Strengthen our people power in key cities:  
Atlanta, Athens, Augusta,  
Clarkston, Decatur,  
Smyrna, and Savannah

Contact  
Jillian Eller



[jillian.eller@sierraclub.org](mailto:jillian.eller@sierraclub.org)

### KEEP THE LIGHTS ON DURING COVID-19

fight utility shutoffs



Help make sure no one is left in the dark as Georgia faces the highest unemployment rates on record

Contact  
Neil Sardana



[neil.sardana@sierraclub.org](mailto:neil.sardana@sierraclub.org)

CLIMATE JUSTICE REQUIRES EVERYONE - EVERY CONTRIBUTION OF TIME, ENERGY, AND EFFORT MAKES US MORE POWERFUL

**SHOW UP AND MAKE YOURSELF HEARD**

# CHANGEMAKER SPOTLIGHT

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

My day job is as a Transportation Planner for the Atlanta Regional Commission, which is quite related to my role as RAIL Chair for GA Sierra Club. I also serve as a judge for the Suzi Bass Awards, which are like Atlanta's version of the Tony's. One of my hobbies is going to a bar with a book. The low level of noise from the crowd helps me drown out the world and focus in on reading. More recently I am finding a lot of joy in taking the bus to trails for day hikes. Proctor Creek Trail and Constitution Lakes Park are new favourites. I grew up in Gwinnett County, and have lived in the city of Atlanta for over a decade now – currently in the Westside area, which is very walkable and has a lot of bus routes running through it.



**Q How did you first get involved as a volunteer with the Sierra Club?**

**A** It was fall of 2017, and I had been working for the Georgia Dept. of Transportation for a few months, and found a lot to love about transportation policy and politics. I was far less thrilled about the very auto-centric views of the agency I worked for, though, so I looked for ways to become more involved in transit advocacy. Georgia Sierra Club was hunting for a new RAIL Chair at that time, and I sent in an email asking more about the role. A short while later I was heading up committee meetings and finding ways to push for more transit in metro Atlanta and the rest of our state.

**Q What's your favorite memory of your time as a Sierra Club volunteer?**

**A** In September 2018, the Georgia Sierra Club hosted a discussion session regarding the project selection of the More MARTA program within the city of Atlanta. Representatives from MARTA, Beltline Rail Now!, Emory University, and GA Stand-Up participated in the discussion, and there was lively feedback from the crowd of advocates and activists who showed up. MARTA shifted their project list to reflect more of what the priorities the public wanted, and I feel like that forum was part of that. I was the moderator for that discussion, and it was such a great evening being engaged in such an important moment.

**Q What would you say to someone who's thinking of getting more involved as a volunteer?**

**A** Sierra Club gives us opportunities to get involved in meaningful conversations and movements that can make our world a more climate-focused and equitable place to live. Making real change is not easy. Nor should it be. We are ready and willing for allies in whatever way they can support us. From simple text banking and signing petitions to leading marches and rallies in front of the state capitol. Please join our fight.

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS WHO WORK DILIGENTLY TO ALIGN SKILLS, INTERESTS, AND EXPERIENCE - TOGETHER, PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE.

**THANK YOU CHANGEMAKERS**



# 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

### JUNETEENTH TRADITIONS CONTINUE

This would have been our sixth year tabling at the annual Cobb NAACP Juneteenth Festival on the Marietta Square. That usual Juneteenth weekend celebration was cancelled this year, but a special Juneteenth Justice Rally & March to the Marietta Square was staged on June 19th to great success. Several Centennial members participated.



(Above and left) Centennial Group members participate in the Cobb NAACP Juneteenth Justice Rally & March in Marietta on June 19.

### SPRING INTO SUMMER

Like most local groups, our unusual and challenging spring has rolled into an equally strange summertime. Many planned meetings, outings, and favorite activities are cancelled or postponed as we respond to the COVID-19 crisis and to justice issues in our community. Thanks for hanging in there with us, for staying engaged, for supporting other members and friends, and for sharing your ideas and feedback. Look for more virtual events and opportunities this summer. Be sure to follow the Centennial Group on Facebook, Meetup, and visit our website for announcements. Thanks to the Metro Atlanta Group for inviting Centennial members to join their two recent remote monthly group meetings. And thank you to Centennial Group leader Claudette Sukenick for again serving as an experienced, much valued Cobb poll official during this election season.



**CLAUDETTE SUKENICK**

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## 'BROTHER' ROGER AT 80

Thanks to members and friends who mailed birthday greeting cards to veteran Centennial Group member Roger Buerki's home address for a socially distant celebration of his 80th birthday on June 21! This summer will also mark the 50th anniversary of the campaign started by Roger and the legendary "River Rats" team to protect and preserve the Chattahoochee River corridor and achieve designation of the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area.



ROGER BUERKI



If you decide to go out on the trail, be sure to wear a mask and practice physical distancing!

## COBB-4-TRANSIT TEAM GOING STRONG

Want to help our efforts to bring expanded transit options to Cobb County and to promote a ballot referendum? Please check with **Cobb4Transit.org**, an independent organization with several founding and active members from the Centennial Group, who will welcome your support and input. Notable completed or in-process activities include Zoom interviews with all Cobb District 4 Commission primary candidates, completing a bus survey, hosting a Facebook Live "Transit Talks" event, applying for an AARP grant, collaborating with Smyrna Connects and the Cumberland CID, and finalizing by-laws. Please contact Linda Bell ([elbell51@yahoo.com](mailto:elbell51@yahoo.com)) to help or for more information.

## GETTING OUTSIDE

Although formal, organized outings are still suspended until further notice, many members and friends continue to find creative, independent ways to get outside in small, socially-distanced groups. As more trails and recreational areas reopen, we hope you will take care, stay safe, wear masks, be well, enjoy, and share your photos.

## GROUP INFORMATION

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

## GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

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

The last few months have been challenging no matter how we have experienced these times. The triple whammy of recession, unemployment, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made it tempting to disengage, but we must remember that we are all a part of something much bigger than ourselves. We have taken immense efforts to ensure the safety of our volunteers, from wearing the appropriate protective gear to conducting meetings online to reducing the number of participants and following distancing guidelines where appropriate.

People have marched knowing they may be putting

themselves in danger, but we did because it was important. This is what motivated hundreds of thousands of people to protest and march not only in Gwinnett and Atlanta and across our country, but in countries around the world.

In Gwinnett, we attended county commission meetings, we measured water quality, we put on an online candidate forum, and we talked with county commissioners to approve a transit referendum this November.

Our efforts to ensure our streams have clean water continued, albeit with reduced numbers of people.

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Our meetings and our County Commission Chair candidate town hall forum were online, ensuring our members and candidates were safe. We expect that online meetings will be the norm for the foreseeable future as we want to ensure the safety of our members and continue our important work.

We hope that you and your families are safe.

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**GROUP INFORMATION**

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

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**LAGRANGE GROUP**

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

**BY SAM BREYFOGLE**, CONSERVATION CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP

The LaGrange Group Leadership Team meetings have been taking place by Zoom and conference call. General meetings have been forestalled while the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has been in effect.

The Group has maintained a presence in the community through local advertising in support of voting and local action. Individual members remained involved in the community in several ways, including organizing a local Black Lives Matter protest downtown, continuing to maintain the local butterfly garden, and conducting citizen science by collecting and reporting data to Cornell Nestwatch from monitoring the club's 21 bluebird boxes. Our Outings Leader has been scouting future field trip



LaGrange residents participated in a Black Lives Matter gathering organized by a LaGrange Group member.

sites. The Group continues participation in Chapter Executive Committee meetings and Chapter Political Committee meetings.

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**GROUP INFORMATION**

Website: [sierraclub.org/lagrange](http://sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/groups/300840033370271](https://facebook.com/groups/300840033370271)

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**METRO ATLANTA GROUP**

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

**BY NINA DUTTON**, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

**GETTING POLITICAL:  
FROM THE BALLOT BOX TO THE STREET**

For weeks on end now, activists in our city and across the world are taking to the streets and flooding the internet with calls for an end to police brutality and demands for racial justice. These actions — only the most recent in a history of hundreds of years of Black and Black-led resistance against white supremacy — are already beginning to shift the

window of what's possible.

We know that there is no environmental justice without racial justice. Metro Atlanta Group's volunteer leaders are already putting their own resources into supporting the current protests demanding justice, as well as supporting existing organizations in their ongoing local work for social justice, and we commit to learning and working toward collective liberation.

We urge our members and volunteers to get informed and get political, now and consistently. Even while the COVID-19 emergency continues, there are abundant ways to get political while still taking measures to

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prevent the spread of this disease.

## IN OUR CONVERSATIONS:

Perhaps you're looking for some quick reading as a starting point for learning more and starting a conversation about how, for a just and sustainable society, we must dismantle the structural racism that burdens Black and Brown communities so heavily with police brutality, mass incarceration, and environmental pollution. Here are two short articles to get started:

- "Racism Is Killing the Planet," by Sierra Club director of strategic partnerships Hop Hopkins ([sierraclub.org/sierra/racism-killing-planet](https://sierraclub.org/sierra/racism-killing-planet))
- "Why Every Environmentalist Should Be Anti-Racist," by Leah Thomas for Vogue ([vogue.com/article/why-every-environmentalist-should-be-anti-racist](https://vogue.com/article/why-every-environmentalist-should-be-anti-racist))

## AT THE BALLOT BOX:

- Voting by mail is a great option this year to avoid crowds and long lines at polling places. Many counties created ballot dropboxes for the June 9 primary and are expected to do so again for run-off and general elections this year. You can submit vote-by-mail (a.k.a. absentee) ballots by sending them through the mail (which requires paid postage), or by submitting them at a dropbox in your county (no postage required), following the instructions included with the ballot. Find drop-off box locations on your county's website.
- We urge you to register to vote if you are eligible. Even if you think you are registered, please check your registration and update it if it's not correct. Please also speak with friends, family, and neighbors about registering to vote and the option to vote by mail.
- Visit [mvp.sos.ga.gov](https://mvp.sos.ga.gov) to register to vote, check and update your registration, request a vote-by-mail ballot, view your sample ballot, and find times and locations for early voting and Election Day voting.
- If you are eligible and registered to vote, we encourage you to vote for candidates who will work to protect our environment for all. Whether or not you are eligible to vote, you can still support candidates aligned with your values by phone banking, making a financial contribution, and more. Georgia Sierra Club has endorsed candidates in several current races. You can find that list on the Political Committee page on our Chapter committee page: [sierraclub.org/georgia/conservation](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/conservation).
- This year, the runoff election day is Aug. 11 (voter registration deadline is July 13), and the general

election day is Nov. 3 (voter registration deadline is Oct. 5).

## IN PUBLIC COMMENTS:

The Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) gave Georgia Power and several gas companies a green light to shut off electricity and gas for struggling Georgia families starting on July 15. This decision to reinstate utility shut offs when people in our state are experiencing the highest unemployment on record (over 12%) is callous and will put many households in a dangerous situation where in addition to losing power, their housing and health are put at risk. These shutoffs will also disproportionately impact Black communities, other communities of color, and low-income families that are already seriously suffering from the crises at hand.

- Call on the Georgia PSC to reverse their decision and halt any shut offs by Georgia Power and gas utilities by posting this sample message on Twitter or other social media:  
*.@GeorgiaPower Don't let the @GeorgiaPSC allow you to leave Georgians struggling during the #COVID19 crisis in the dark! #NoShutOffs #StopTheShutOffs*
- Please reach out to the Georgia PSC to oppose their decision and demand they stop shutoffs by Georgia Power and gas utilities at [psc.ga.gov/public-comments](https://psc.ga.gov/public-comments).

## IN THE STREETS:

Protests as part of the Movement for Black Lives have been ongoing for weeks in Atlanta and around the world. If you are feeling healthy and decide to go in person, please wear a mask and maintain physical distancing to the extent possible in order to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

- The Twitter account @WhereProtest is a helpful resource for finding protests in the metro area. They also retweet the original posts so you can get more information about the type of action to expect (e.g., march in the street vs. vigil at one location).
- This Tampa Bay Times news article provides info on how to prepare for and respond to tear gas and rubber bullets, which police have been using on protestors on occasion ([tampabay.com/news/health/2020/06/09/how-to-protect-eyes-from-teargas-pepper-spray-and-rubber-bullets-during-protests](https://tampabay.com/news/health/2020/06/09/how-to-protect-eyes-from-teargas-pepper-spray-and-rubber-bullets-during-protests)).
- Can't take to the street? Your help is still needed! Check out this resource on ways to support

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protests if you can't be in the streets: [issuu.com/nlc.sf.2014/docs/beyondthestreets\\_final](https://issuu.com/nlc.sf.2014/docs/beyondthestreets_final).

While this current wave of protests will be just a month old by the end of June, many local organizations have been working successfully for years for social justice. If you're not already, get connected with local Black-led organizations and groups engaged in work for social justice. Follow on social media or sign up for emails, learn about their work, read resources they share, and find out how to support now and going forward.

- Need some examples? Check out the work of Southerners on New Ground ([southernersonnewground.org](https://southernersonnewground.org)), Women on the Rise ([womennontherise.org](https://womennontherise.org)), Solutions Not Punishment Collaborative ([snap4freedom.org](https://snap4freedom.org)), and Project South ([projectsouth.org](https://projectsouth.org), [facebook.com/projectsouthatl](https://facebook.com/projectsouthatl)).

## RECENT GROUP MEETINGS

Our April, May, and June meetings were all held remotely, accessible online and by phone.

**Apr. 14:** For our first entirely remote meeting, our featured speakers were Sunrise Movement Southeast Regional Organizer Cristina DuQue and Sunrise Movement North Georgia Hub Coordinator Erica Darragh. We learned about the youth-led climate justice organization known as Sunrise Movement ([sunrisemovement.org](https://sunrisemovement.org)) and discussed how, with in-person actions on Earth Day out of the question during the COVID-19 emergency, Sunrise pivoted this spring to an online training campaign called Sunrise School.

In Georgia, activists with Sunrise Movement, Sierra Club, and many other local organizations formed the Atlanta Earth Day Coalition to put on a set of interactive online events as part of Earth Day Live. The recordings are posted on the Sierra Club Metro Atlanta Group Facebook page, including at [facebook.com/SierraClubATL/posts/2870049113083434](https://facebook.com/SierraClubATL/posts/2870049113083434).

**May 12:** Our featured speaker for May was Peggy Whitlow Ratcliffe, Founder and Director of Live Thrive Atlanta, the organization that created the Center for Hard to Recycle Materials (CHaRM). In addition to getting questions answered about recycling specific materials, we also discussed the low tipping fees that incentivize the shipment of waste (including coal ash) to Georgia landfills, how we can push for legislation to raise the tipping fees and force manufacturers to take responsibility for the materials they make, as well as other strategies available to us

to shape the systems in which we use materials.

**Jun. 11:** In a departure from our usual speaker series format, we recapped some major takeaways from a virtual roundtable held earlier the same day called "OUTdoors. INclusive. A Vision of Nature for All." Participants in our meeting then engaged in a thoughtful discussion of what we can do as individuals and as activists to work toward a vision of "nature for all."

The recording of the "OUTdoors. INclusive. A Vision of Nature for All" roundtable is now available online ([youtube.com/watch?v=IP4VkwWqCWY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=IP4VkwWqCWY)), and we recommend listening! We also recommend checking out and supporting the local work of the organizations that hosted it: Park Pride, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, Nature Conservancy, and Trust for Public Land.

Some top-level takeaways from the roundtable were:

- Social and physical barriers prevent safe and enjoyable access to nature.
- Representation matters, and access to nature needs to be diverse, welcoming, and inclusive for all.
- With any local planning of a park or other infrastructure, the local community should be involved with the design from the beginning, not as an afterthought.

One way to take action with Sierra Club toward welcoming a new generation to the outdoors is by supporting the Inspiring Connections Outdoors (ICO) program in Atlanta. ICO is a community outreach program providing opportunities for young people in urban areas to explore, enjoy, and protect the natural world. Learn more by visiting [sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta-ico](https://sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta-ico).

## CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS, STAY UP TO DATE

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

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

The Metro Atlanta Group generally meets on the

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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.

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](mailto:nddutton@gmail.com)) to confirm details.

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## GROUP INFORMATION

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

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## SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

**BY LINDA MCBURNEY**, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP, & **FRANK CARL**, CONSERVATION CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact what and how we do meetings, outings, and other events involving social gathering. Frank Carl, SRG's Conservation Chair, recently gave a presentation about another issue that is affecting our society: how false and misleading information can inform a person's thinking and ultimately the decisions they make, including those decisions made in a voting booth.

The following is an excerpt from Dr. Carl's talk about "jobs-killing environmental regulation" and the history of that phrase:

"The term 'jobs-killing environmental regulation' was coined by Ronald Reagan in the 1980 campaign. I am sure that he knew that the term was inaccurate, but he needed a cover for his efforts to curb regulation and increase corporate profits. Environmental was an exchangeable adjective in the phrase. He was against government-imposed regulations in general because they tended to decrease corporate profits.

"The phrase has been used by Republican politicians many times over the years since Reagan used it in the 1980 campaign. One of the effects of environmental regulations that conservative politicians tend to ignore is the beneficial effects on the health and welfare of the populations they are meant to protect. In a comprehensive study of the effects of the Clean Air Act between 1990 and 2010 published in the Quarterly Journal of Economics in 2013, Reed Walker found that the displacement of workers cost the workers (or unemployment insurance) \$5.4 billion while the beneficial health effects of the Act saved between \$160 billion and \$1.6 trillion in health care costs. That is a benefit to cost ratio of between 30

to 1 and 300 to 1. Lopsided benefit/cost ratios like this are not unusual, especially for environmental regulations. So why the misleading hype? Why not emphasize the benefits of the regulations? Follow the money.

"But what about the actual effects of environmental regulations on jobs? Several studies have looked at that question and all of them concluded that the overall effect of environmental regulations on jobs is a wash. Environmental regulations eliminate some jobs but they create others, generally in about equal numbers. However, environmental regulations can cause a shift in jobs both technically and geographically. That fact can seriously affect technically challenged and immobile workers and can therefore be used as a political hammer. Indeed, a 1999 survey of the literature indicated that environmental protection is not the 'economic monster some would have us believe.' It should definitely not be the political hammer that it has been. And the regulations should get credit for the lives and the money that they save.

"And maybe politicians should be proposing programs to retrain workers whose jobs have been lost to do the more technically challenging and higher paying jobs that have been created ..."

With the upcoming elections, it is important to discern what the candidates are saying about the environment, how regulations are impacting us individually, and what they are proposing to improve the environment so that marginalized and low income communities are not negatively affected.

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## GROUP INFORMATION

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



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## VISIT US ONLINE

Check out our website ([sierraclub.org/georgia](http://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