

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • JULY / AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2022



SPEND THE SUMMER OUTDOORS!

INSIDE: FIGHTING GEORGIA POWER'S PROPOSED RATE HIKES • OKEFENOKEE UPDATES
PROTECTING THE WEELAUNEE (SOUTH RIVER) FOREST • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS AND MORE!

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.

HAPPY TRAILS TO ANGELA JIANG AND JILLIAN ELLER!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter extends a sincere thank you and happy trails to two of our staff members: Conservation Program Manager Angela Jiang and Conservation Organizer Jillian Eller.

Angela left the Georgia Chapter to attend Georgia State University, where she is working toward a Master's of Education degree in School Counseling.

After nearly three years with the Chapter, starting as a conservation fellow before being promoted to organizer, Jillian is also leaving the Sierra Club for graduate school. Jillian plans to attend East Carolina University to pursue a PhD in Integrated Coastal Studies with an emphasis on Marine Renewable Energy.

Angela and Jillian made indelible impacts on the Chapter, and our gratitude for them cannot be overstated. We wish them well as they move into new phases of their careers. Thanks for everything, AJ and JB.

NOTE OUR NEW ADDRESS

Please note that the Georgia Chapter will begin receiving physical mail at a new address.

Our new mailing address is:
Sierra Club Georgia Chapter
PO Box 1281
Decatur, GA 30031

All mail correspondence with the Chapter should be sent to this new address.

JOIN THE GEORGIA 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).

If you are interested in serving or know someone who would be a capable Chapter ExCom member, contact Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com.

Chapter and Group ExCom candidate statements and any nomination petitions for candidates must be submitted by September 10, 2022. Complete rules for the election can be found at sierraclub.org/georgia/ExComElections2022.

Ballots with candidate statements will be distributed by mail and electronically by October 1, 2022. Ballots must be returned to the Georgia Chapter by 5 p.m. on November 15, 2022. Details for returning ballots and ballot counting will be published on the Chapter website and in the next issue of the Georgia Sierran.

GEORGIA SIERRAN

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On the Cover

Sierrans pose for a photo after a recent Outing hiking up Blood Mountain in North Georgia.

Credit: Lee Graham

IN THIS ISSUE

Chapter News • Page 2

Committee Reports • Pages 3-13

Group News • Pages 14-17

Directory • Pages 18-19

Help us fight Georgia Power's outrageous price hikes

BY SIERRA CLUB BEYOND COAL TEAM

Starting in late July, Georgia Power will undergo a legal process called a “Rate Case” before the Public Service Commission (PSC), which will determine how much the utility can charge customers for electricity.

Rate Case proceedings happen every three years; this year's edition is the first time since 2019 that these financial questions have been examined. Although the PSC is not an actual court, the Rate Case has similar components to a trial, including sworn witnesses, expert testimony, and a formal record. At the end of the process in December of 2022, our five elected Public Service Commissioners will enter a final order about the economics of our electricity.

Sierra Club is gearing up to represent the interests of Georgians during the proceedings. During the last Rate Case in 2019, we argued that Georgia Power should not be able to pass 100% of the costs for closing coal ash ponds on to customers — a question that is still being litigated in front of the Georgia Supreme Court. This time around, we will continue to advocate that Georgia Power should be financially responsible for the coal ash mess it created. Georgia Power is spending over a billion dollars over a three-year period for coal ash remediation without specific plans for how the money will be spent!

Not only that, Georgia Power wants to “cap in place” millions of tons of coal ash without a liner between the toxic ash and the soil, risking further groundwater contamination. The Georgia PSC should hold Georgia Power accountable for decades of coal ash mismanagement, especially because Georgia Power's plan to cap-in-place millions of tons of coal ash doesn't comply with federal and state law. It's unfair for Georgia Power to ask customers to pay for the mess that it knowingly created.

Of big concern for Sierra Club during the 2022 rate case is Georgia Power's proposed rate hike of 11.9%, which will increase the average monthly bill of a typical customer by \$16.29. Folks in Georgia already experience some of the highest energy burdens

(percentage of income spent on utility bills) in the country. Increasing rates dramatically during precarious economic times could spell disaster for thousands of Georgians who are already struggling, forcing tough choices like keeping the lights on or buying necessities like medicine that month.

No Georgian should experience a crisis because of a power bill. We'll work hard to fight Georgia Power's proposed rate hikes.

Ready to join us? No matter your background or experience, we need everyone in the fight for affordable, clean energy. To get involved in the Rate Case, email Neil Sardana (neil.sardana@sierraclub.org) to get plugged in.

COAL ASH UPDATES

More delays! Although we expected to receive draft permits for more of Georgia Power's coal ash closure plans, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has not released another coal ash permit since the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sent a letter to EPD Director Dunn in January of 2022. The EPA letter essentially put the Georgia EPD “on notice,” stating that the EPA believes the agency is not correctly interpreting laws regarding safe coal ash pond closure and is allowing Georgia Power to leave coal ash sitting in groundwater, which leads to ongoing groundwater contamination with heavy metals.

We are waiting and ready to fight for clean and safe water for all Georgians, which means advocating that coal ash be properly stored in dry, lined landfills away from waterways.

For more information about coal ash in Georgia and to sign up for alerts when new permits are released, go to georgiacoalash.org.

The fight for clean energy in Georgia continues! Join us!

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

The Clean Energy Committee continues to advocate for clean energy and energy efficiency at the state level through Georgia Power's 2022 Integrated Resource Plan process. The plan will be finalized in late July, and we put in hard work to push for a transition away from fossil fuels and to renewable energy. Up next in this process comes the Rate Case, which will determine the financial plan to pay for the state's energy resource needs. For more information on the Rate Case, see the Beyond Coal Campaign Sierran update in this issue.

As our COVID-19 safety protocols have allowed, we have hosted many opportunities for people to take action in person. For example, the Georgia Chapter mobilized a few dozen advocates to speak at a town hall hosted by the Public Service Commission on March 24th to hear concerns of ratepayers. Members of the public spoke about the need to address climate change by increasing the accessibility of renewable energy and shutting down coal plants. Folks also demanded that the Public Service Commission offer the opportunity for public comments during the Integrated Resource Planning (IRP) hearings, both in person and virtually.

Later in April, in collaboration with the Climate Reality Atlanta Chapter and Georgia Conservation Voters, the Chapter hosted a rally outside the Public Service Commission (PSC) during their



Photo credit: Neil Sardana

Protestors gather outside the Georgia Capitol as part of a week of action related to the Integrated Resource Plan in April.

first day of IRP hearings. More than 40 people attended and representatives of each organization spoke about the need for public access to the hearings, calling out the Public Service Commissioners for prioritizing profits over people and emphasized a call to action to continue fighting. Finally, the Georgia Chapter worked together with many grassroots organizations to host a Southern Company week of action, which included a candlelight vigil outside the PSC's offices, a protest outside Southern Company's recent shareholders meeting, engaging shareholders to ask questions during that meeting, and more.

One of our biggest accomplishments in this year's Integrated Resource Planning process was encouraging local governments that have committed to 100% clean energy to intervene in the process. Atlanta, Decatur, Athens, Savannah, Fulton County, and DeKalb County banded together to enter as an intervenor under

the title "the Georgia Coalition for Local Governments." They advocated on both the residential and municipal side for solar and energy efficiency, underscored the importance of the creation of local jobs, and the necessity for resilient communities.

After deep analysis of the original proposal issued by Georgia Power for the 2022 Integrated Resource Plan, the Georgia Chapter, in partnership with the Beyond Coal Campaign developed a report card to break down the jargon-ridden document into a digestible synopsis of the plan. Categories for the report card include commitment to climate action, ditching coal, no fracked gas, going big on clean energy, energy burden and equity, pollution, and electric vehicles. To view the entire report card, see it at bit.ly/IRP22-Grades.

Interested in getting involved? There's still time before the PSC makes a final decision in late July. Sign up here: sc.org/IRP-2022.

Climate action in coalition

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The Climate Action Campaign of Georgia is busy building a coalition for federal advocacy through both Congress and the EPA. In addition to our partners Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, Moms Clean Air Force Georgia, and the Environmental Defense Fund, we have been seeking partnerships in this environmental and intersectional movement.

On April 23, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter and 26 partner organizations hosted a rally at Liberty Plaza in Atlanta in celebration of Earth Day to call on the Biden Administration to follow through on the promise of climate action. Programming for the event included a broad lineup of speakers, music by local artists, games, food, and opportunities to take action. More than 600 people joined



Photo credit: Erik Voss/CAC

Above: A "Climate Can't Wait" sign is held by an attendee at the Sierra Club's Earth Day event at Liberty Plaza in Atlanta on April 23. Below: The full crowd of folks who attended the Earth Day rally line up for a photo with the Georgia Capitol behind them.

us to fight for federal advocacy to take care of the environment at our Earth Day event, and we look forward to continuing to fight for climate action with these folks moving forward.

In addition to continuing to pressure the Biden Administration and elected members of Congress to take bold leadership on climate, the Georgia Chapter has been hard at work collecting comments

to the Environmental Protection Agency on the Cross State Air Pollution Rule. If passed, this rule will restrict air pollution in Georgia from neighboring states and their toxic industries, power plant pollution, and other particulate matter. Centennial Group members were able to take part in this effort during their June 2nd picnic, and we've done outreach to the public through tabling at local farmer's markets.



Help us protect the Weelaunee (South River) Forest

BY NINA DUTTON, EQUITY COMMITTEE MEMBER AND METRO ATLANTA GROUP CHAIR & **BETTYE HARRIS**, EQUITY COMMITTEE MEMBER AND CENTENNIAL GROUP DELEGATE TO CHAPTER EXCOM

Where southwest DeKalb County meets southeast Atlanta, between the triangle of streets formed by Key, Constitution, and Bouldercrest roads, a forest protects Intrinchment Creek. This — one of the largest remaining stands of forest inside the Perimeter — is part of the Weelaunee Forest (Weelaunee is a Mvskoke name for what is called the South River in English).

Most days in the forest right now are still calm, many human visitors might say. Walk or roll along the paved South River Trail through Intrinchment Creek Park, or step off onto a soft forest path, and you may only be greeted with birdsong, ripening blackberries, the wind rustling tulip poplar leaves, and maybe a group of friends chatting as they enjoy a walk together.

But already, Atlanta Police Department gunshots ring out from its existing firing range on the north side of the forest. And workers under contract have used bulldozers and chainsaws to tear into the forest, despite stop work orders from DeKalb County and a land disturbance permit still not granted, as of early June 2022.

This forest (and the adjacent neighborhoods) face two major threats:

- In September 2021, the Atlanta City Council voted to lease 381 acres of this forested area west of Intrinchment Creek to the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) to build a massive, regional, militarized training facility. Opponents of the facility call it "Cop City" (as in #StopCopCity).
- East of the creek is Intrinchment Creek Park. Currently a public park, DeKalb County has agreed to a land swap that would give ownership of a forested area of the park to Blackhall Studios in exchange for cleared land. If the swap is completed, Blackhall Studios would clear forest to build a huge studio complex.

The City of Atlanta owns the 381 acres of land leased to the APF, but it actually sits in unincorporated DeKalb County, about a mile east of Atlanta's

borders. The APF aims to use approximately 85 acres of the leased land to build a training facility, complete with a simulated city for officers to train in, a helicopter landing base, new outdoor shooting ranges, and burn tower sites.

In early June 2022, DeKalb Commissioner (and former Georgia Chapter Director) Ted Terry released the "land disturbance permit" for the project to the press after the Atlanta Police Foundation, which is leading the planning, tried to withhold the information citing "security concerns."

Since the APF's intention to build its facility became public in spring 2021, the grassroots movement to stop the facility has been growing. From tree-sits in the forest to a march led by children, from summits and community meetings to phone call campaigns focused on local governments, APF's corporate sponsors, and APF's contractors, popular resistance has taken diverse forms and involvement from many passionate people. The Georgia Chapter came out against the proposal last year, and leaders in the Chapter Equity Committee & the Metro Atlanta Group have been working to amplify local calls to action since. The number of reasons to stop this project are so many, and opposition so broadly popular, yet elected officials are still allowing it to move forward. This online op-ed does a great job summarizing many of the issues at play: bit.ly/SouthRiverForestOpEd.

Since the forest cools the surrounding neighborhoods and absorbs and filters stormwater, the additional heat and flooding that is expected to result if forest is destroyed — on top of the stress of hearing gunshots and explosives testing from the APF facility if it is built — would likely have the greatest impact in the adjacent neighborhoods. This news article (atlanta.capitalnews.org/atlanta-cop-city-climate-change) includes interviews with folks who would live near the proposed facility, who make it clear that they don't want live gun ranges and burn buildings in their neighborhood.

That's not to say that the potential environmental hazards would remain close to the proposed APF facility. Heavy metals and toxic chemical residues from the APF's proposed outdoor shooting range and possible explosives testing at the facility could pose

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risks to human health and local ecosystems, both nearby and even downstream along Intramural Creek and the rivers it flows into. For example, lead is widely recognized as a major environmental pollutant and health hazard from shooting ranges, and the migration of lead within shooting ranges and offsite has been reported in scientific literature. In 2021, the organization American Rivers recognized the South River as one of the 10 most endangered rivers in the United States, noting that south DeKalb communities have been dealing with sewage pollution of this river for decades. With many landfills in south DeKalb as well, the APF's proposal to bring even more sources of pollution to this area is a matter of environmental injustice.

The latest site plans for the APF facility include a "future public park" on part of the leased property outside of the facility. But if the park is on land under lease by APF, or created and maintained as part of APF's plan, this raises questions about how accessible this land would be to the public. In an explicit sense, how much and in what ways would APF control access and use of the park? And in an implicit sense, to what degree would members of the public feel welcome in a park where gunshots and explosions can be heard from the adjacent militarized training facility, at a location where police are likely to be traveling through constantly, especially considering racial disparities in the likelihood of being stopped by police, arrested, and subjected to police use of lethal force?

In parallel with movements against fossil fuel pipelines led by indigenous water protectors, members of the Muscogee community have expressed deep concerns about the fate of the Weelaunee Forest and are taking action. In an video on Twitter, Mekko Chebon Kernell discusses the return of Muscogee people to Weelaunee and the significance of this work (find the video at bit.ly/MekkoChebonKernell).

At an April 2022 summit, for which Muscogee community members returned to Weelaunee to participate, many discussions touched upon not only opposition to the APF facility but also envisioning of positive possible futures that this movement could create, including what "land back" and stewardship in common could mean for this place.

We can all agree that destroying one of the last remaining undeveloped forests inside the Perimeter is a bad idea. Stay tuned for more news on this topic as things continue to unfold.

Resources for taking action on this issue:

1. Petition calling on Atlanta Mayor Dickens to cancel the city's lease of the Weelaunee forest land to the Atlanta Police Foundation:
 - act.colorofchange.org/sign/no-cop-city-atl
 - Contact Mayor Dickens' office directly via:
 - Phone: 404.330.6100
 - Email: adickens@atlantaga.gov
2. Contact info for DeKalb County commissioners, whom the South River Forest Coalition and others are calling upon to stop the DeKalb County government from granting a land disturbance permit to APF for the facility
 - dekalbcountyga.gov/board-commissioners/board-commissioners
 - Activists are also calling on Rick Cunningham, deputy director of the DeKalb County Office of Planning & Sustainability, to deny the APF's requests for tree clearing permits (permit #1245564). A phone number and call script provided by @StopCopCity on Instagram:
 - instagram.com/p/Cd8nJhaugRT
3. Info page on Brasfield & Gorrie, the general contractor company that currently appears, according to public records, to have been hired by APF for construction of the facility:
 - stopreevesyoung.com/brasfield-gorrie
 - Those who oppose the facility can use this info to contact the company and its subcontractors directly and call on them to drop the contract with APF.
 - Part of the call-in campaign is focused on Long Engineering. This Twitter thread has the number to call for Long Engineering and the phone extensions to use so that the call is not dropped: bit.ly/LongCalls.
4. Online survey as part of Atlanta Regional Commission's "South River Forest Consensus Building & Stakeholder Engagement" process:
 - publicinput.com/SouthRiverForest

RACIAL HEALING HANDBOOK

Over the past several months, Georgia Chapter staff and volunteer leaders have been working through Anneliese Singh's "Racial Healing Handbook." As an organization, we deeply believe our fights for climate and racial justice are inextricably linked and acknowledge that we all have a lot of work to do in order to embed our values (sierraclub.org/sierra-club-values) deeply into our structures and everyday work. We're grateful for the support we've received along the way in this journey and look forward to continuing to grow, learn, and act alongside each other.

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From Nina Dutton, Metro Atlanta Group Chair:

"I would like to express gratitude to the Chapter staff and the rest of the equity committee for inviting me to read and discuss this book with fellow volunteers. While many of the concepts presented in the book were not novel to me by the time I was reading it, I

still found it challenging to examine moments from my life through the exercises this book provided, illuminating to hear from other volunteers, and worthwhile overall both on a personal level and when thinking about how to move forward as a Sierra Club volunteer leader."

OUTINGS

Looking to grow

BY GRANT BROWN, OUTINGS CHAIR

I have been really enjoying meeting so many Georgia Sierrans since coming into my new role. I continue to appreciate the support of Lee Graham as I assume his old job.

My primary goal for Outings is to grow, grow, grow. You may have noticed we have been offering more outings this year. We had a leader training class in April and will have another in September. We believe that if we lead it, they will come. Outings are an essential part of the work of the club. It is an incredible way to connect with the general public for some fun outdoors mixed in with a conservation message. It nurtures our grassroots connections immensely and that's why we believe in the mission. But we need your help with this! Please consider participating in an outing, spreading the word to others to come out, and encouraging folks you know who might make good outings leaders to get in touch with me.

We are looking to grow in other ways also, by offering demographic group-specific outings. These outings would be limited to participants in their 20s-40s, families with children, women, and LGBT folks. We are also looking to offer some artsy/New Age-like hikes that would involve silence, meditation, and dancing. We will continue to think about the



Photo credits: Max Brown / Laura Breyfogle

Recent Sierra Club outings have included trips to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (above) and Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park (below).



concepts of "nature as healer," and "Outdoor More, Stress Less."

Here are some highlights from outings so far this year:

- Backpacking is back! We have completed two trips since November (Cohutta Wilderness and Chattooga River) and just wrapped up another trip in June. I was pleased to welcome Molly Michalak as a leader trainee on a recent trip.

- Leader Max Brown, who is an avid birder, led a great outing in the Okefenokee Swamp.
- Leader Laura Breyfogle led 20 participants on a historical walk in Macon at the Ocmulgee Mounds. They were joined by National Park Service staff as well as a member of the Muscogee Nation.

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- New mid-week time slot down by the river! I have had two outings so far in recent weeks at the Chattahoochee River and hope to continue this as a weekly event with the help of leader Norman Slawsky.
- Some great deep wilderness hikes have been completed by me, Lee Graham, and Steve Mintz including: Cohutta

Wilderness, Appalachian Trail, and Wildcat Creek WMA.

- Lots of cool things have been happening with the Savannah River Group in Augusta, including bike rides at Euchee Creek and hikes on the Bartram Trail, Mistletoe State Park, and the amazing Congaree National Park in South Carolina.

Coming up! Laura Breyfogle will continue hosting the Organic Farm Tour Summer Series. This is a great opportunity as a family outing as well. She hopes to organize a farm-to-table luncheon during one of the tours. We hope to meet more of you out on the trails soon!

Keep an eye on the calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar) for upcoming outings and events.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

What do you endorse?

BY EDDIE EHLERT, CHAIR, POLITICAL COMMITTEE

The heart of our Political Program starts with our efforts to delve into the motives of first time candidates relative to protection of our shared environment and their dedication to vote in protection of the necessities for life common to all beings. Meanwhile, we want to support the incumbent candidates who have shown the courage to cast votes that support our shared interests often despite financial incentives to vote in ways that would destroy those treasures that belong to all of us.

Many groups across the political spectrum endorse candidates for various reasons that ring true to their closely held interests. Such is the right for Americans to freely associate and make their voices heard.

In this election, at least so far, there is a new and much more insidious level of endorsement. One need look no further than the non-stop TV ads, print ads, and radio spots that tout the legitimacy of a candidate simply because they have seen fit to roll in the dirt at the feet of a man who conspired and acted to steal the authority to govern this nation. What leadership qualities should a voter assume are hidden in a candidate who would accept, much less seek, such an endorsement?

There are candidates running in multiple levels of elective office in our state who have nothing to offer the voters except that hollow endorsement.

Permanence has many facets. The threat to our rivers, streams and groundwater from coal ash leachate is permanent as long as the contaminant is in potential contact with water. The people who put the contaminant there have known for decades what a danger it

posed and dawdled while the cleanup costs only multiplied. Once the water is contaminated, the damage is permanent just like when the contaminated water is consumed by people or animals. It won't get any cheaper to control the threat and the money to remediate need only be spent once, if it is done properly.

How many Georgians endorse half-measures to prevent poisoning the water?

A better legislature and state executive branch could overturn recently passed legislation that, if allowed to proceed, will eventually make many Georgia rivers and streams run pink thanks to massive concentrated animal farming operations with huge waste lagoons attached. The ever increasing number of hurricanes and tropical storms over our area coupled with amplified severity is a recipe for disaster (just ask the folks in North Carolina) yet all the money spent to entice legislators to allow planning and construction of such facilities won't even scratch the costs to clean up the inevitable mess.

One would be busy for a while to find anyone who endorses saddling the public with that responsibility.

But back to Sierra Club's endorsements. We already have our list of incumbent champions who deserve our vote and support so they may continue the hard work of doing that which is in the long-term interests of Georgians — as opposed to immediate profits of the very few.

With the runoff behind us, the Georgia Chapter Political Committee will continue to sort through the new candidates who provide a ray of hope for our environment, our rights as humans, our shared access to opportunity, and our right to freely express our opinions at the ballot box. It is fairly involved and intense work, but we want to be sure a Sierra Club endorsement means something to our members and our fellow citizens. This is your world, vote to protect it for all of us!

Ready for 100 sunsets, but the work goes on

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

It is with bittersweet emotions that we announce the sunset of the national Ready for 100 campaign. This decision was announced at the end of April. Campaigns, by definition, have a start and an end date. The end of Ready for 100 as a national campaign has a varied effect in Georgia; while we are no longer supported by the structure of a national campaign to transition to clean energy, we are still prioritizing the work. We still believe in and are fighting for a just transition to a future powered by clean and renewable energy.

In essence, national staff support specific to Ready For 100 has been phased out. The Sierra Club is working across the clean energy campaigns to absorb the work and break down silos for effective local prioritization of clean energy goals. The hope is to give Chapters more flexibility and autonomy for their distributed work in the transition to clean energy. This local focus will also put more emphasis on strengthening equity and energy democracy in our clean energy programs. While

the national Ready for 100 campaign has ended, use of the "Ready for 100" name and logo, online resources and toolkit, Add-Ups, etc. may continue at the Chapter and local group levels. Despite the changes at the National Sierra Club, the work lives on for all of our Georgia Ready for 100 campaigns and efforts. Clean energy remains a priority for the Georgia Chapter.

While we may not be able to answer all of your questions, our Chapter Director and leaders on our Executive Committee can field questions about implications this has on funding, staffing, volunteer leader roles, communications, and prioritization of energy goals.

Together with your support, we've achieved some incredible wins that pushed the envelope for clean energy expansion in this state with the Ready for 100 campaign. We started off with Atlanta's commitment to 100%, then moved onwards to commitments from Clarkston, Augusta-Richmond County, Athens-Clarke County, DeKalb County, and Savannah. The fight continues with active campaigns to do the same in Decatur and Gwinnett County, as well as development and implementation of action plans and monitoring progress for years going forward by cities/counties further along on this journey. Those efforts don't stop here — this is a long-term movement.

We will work hard to honor and uphold the values of Ready for

100. The campaign was one of the first in this organization to seriously center equity, accountability, and environmental justice in its theory of change. We hope you will join us to do the same.

Local campaigns are still making progress with municipalities to advance clean energy.

In Atlanta, neighborhood leaders from communities with the highest energy burdens (percent of income spent on electricity bills) continue to meet to advance the goals of the city's transition to clean energy.

In Athens, council is preparing to review the draft for their municipality's transition plan to 100% clean energy.

In Decatur, activists are pursuing energy efficiency programs for the city, supporting completion of the Clean Energy Action Plan, and encouraging folks in the community to submit comments to the Public Service Commission asking for more renewable energy statewide through Georgia Power's Integrated Resource Plan.

And in Gwinnett, a coalition of organizations is advocating for the creation of a county sustainability office to coordinate climate action across county departments. We are looking for volunteers throughout Gwinnett County to help us in this effort. Have an interest in volunteering? Contact Ready For 100 team leader Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Calling all transportation advocates! Join us!

BY SIERRA CLUB STAFF

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 Tia Fay at tia.fay@sierraclub.org if you are interested in this role. Read more about the position at bit.ly/GA-Transportation-Chair.

WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

An Okefenokee update & a recap of a recent outing in the Swamp

BY RICKY LEROUX,
COMMUNICATIONS
COORDINATOR, SIERRA CLUB
GEORGIA CHAPTER & PETE
FOLLOWILL, OKEFENOKEE ACTION
TEAM MEMBER

Fantastic news regarding our campaign to protect the Okefenokee Swamp!

First, some background: In 2019, a company called Twin Pines Minerals filed applications for several permits to begin mining for titanium. This mining would take place in an area called Trail Ridge, which forms a geological boundary on the eastern side of the Okefenokee Swamp.

Originally, Twin Pines had to seek the permits from federal regulators at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. But after the Trump administration weakened the Clean Water Act, the wetlands outside the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge were no longer under federal jurisdiction. This left



Photo credit: Ricky Leroux

Spanish moss hangs from tree branches overlooking the Okefenokee Swamp.

review and approval of the mining operation in the hands of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. We've been working to stop this mine under this arrangement since October 2020.

But back to our big news: In early June, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reversed its decision to allow the proposed mine to proceed without federal approval, delivering a significant setback to Twin Pines Minerals' planned mining project.

What does this mean? For starters, Twin Pines will have to resubmit the applications for necessary permits under a much more rigorous federal review process. The decision will also require closer

consultation with the Muscogee Creek Nation, which has deep connections with the area.

The fight to protect the Okefenokee does not end here. The president of Twin Pines has already told the press that the company intends to move forward with its plans under this new federal review process.

The Army Corps of Engineers will likely be seeking input on the proposal through a public comment period. We don't yet know when that will be, so sign our Okefenokee petition at bit.ly/okefenokee and we'll let

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you know when opportunities for public input come up!

THE BEAUTY OF THE SWAMP

On the morning of April 2, 2022, a group of relatively early risers gathered at the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge's Richard S. Bolt Visitor Center to begin a daylong bird walk and swamp tour. Sixteen adults made up our group, including several members from Sierra Club's Atlanta, Centennial, and LaGrange groups.

Our group hoped to locate two endangered birds during our Okefenokee visit, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow. Fortunately, we did not have to wait long. Our first stop was along Canal Diggers Trail, where we were immediately greeted by the Bachman's trill. We then saw the first of four Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers that we tallied for the morning. While watching the woodpecker hammer away at a pine's bark, one of our group members caught a quick glimpse of a Kentucky Warbler; the sighting was soon confirmed by the bird's rolling song.

We recorded a handful of other species along the trail, including Palm and Pine Warblers, Pileated and Red-Bellied Woodpeckers, Eastern Bluebirds, and a White-Eyed Vireo, and although they were obscured by the morning fog, we could easily hear the rattling calls of Sandhill Cranes. As we were completing the trail loop and nearing our cars, we spotted a Bachman's Sparrow, an otherwise inconspicuous small brownish bird, singing from its perch high on a pine limb. Both the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and Bachman's Sparrow are habitat specialists, preferring open stands of old pines with little growth in the understory. Fire suppression

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

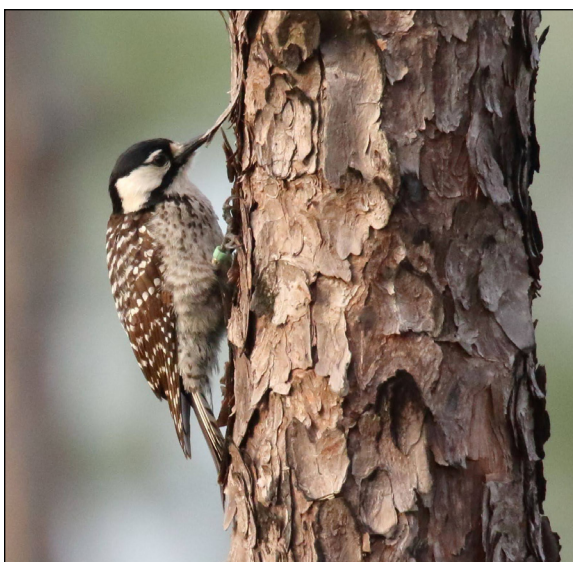


Photo credits: Pete Followill

In April, Sierra Club Outings Leaders organized an all-day bird walk and swamp tour through the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. An American Bittern (top), a Great Egret (middle), and a Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (left) were among the species they spotted on the trip.

and logging management practices have reduced available habitat for these two species, contributing to their declining populations. The woodpecker nests in live pines infected with red heart fungus while the sparrow nests on the grassy ground next to a small shrub, pine seedling, or clump of grass. Thanks to effective habitat management, Okefenokee NWR supports populations of both vulnerable birds.

From Canal Diggers Trail, we moved along to the Chesser Island Homestead Trail. While walking this heavily wooded trail, we saw and heard several Northern Parulas, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, and Great-Crested Flycatchers. Ranger Rebecca Stitt gave us a guided tour of the homestead, which provided our group with a snapshot of pioneer life in the 19th century, following the United States government's forcible removal of the Seminoles.

Following lunch, the group boarded a flat-bottom skiff for a guided boat tour. Danielle, our boat tour guide, shared her vast knowledge of the swamp's diverse flora and fauna. Traveling down the Suwannee Canal, we encountered multiple American Bitterns, singing Prothonotary Warblers, and Barred Owls, including one who flew into a nearby tree with its own lunch, an unlucky rat. The canal then fed into the open expanse of Chesser Prairie, where we encountered large islands of floating peat as well as water lilies, golden club, and other swamp plants. We were invited to experience the peat firsthand, with several of us handling a small spongy sample of the natural carbon sink. On the return trip up the canal, we viewed several recently fledged Barred Owls, a Great Egret, and more American Bitterns.

After our boat tour, we walked the Boardwalk Trail to the observation

tower and added Gray Catbird and Common Yellowthroat to our list for the day.

Our bird walk and swamp tour concluded at the visitor center, where we wished one another safe

travels before climbing in our cars and leaving behind this unique and irreplaceable land.

Keep an eye on our calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar) for more outings like this!



Photo credit: Laura Breyfogle

Sierrans smile for a camera during a short break in their recent outing in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

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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SUMMER 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

JUNETEENTH ON THE MARIETTA SQUARE

We were pleased once again to join the annual Marietta Juneteenth Festival sponsored by the Cobb Branch of the NAACP. This was the 19th year for this particular event, and the seventh year that the Centennial Group has participated. Thank you to all volunteers and friends who stopped by to help us and to say hello. It was a well-attended and wonderful celebration!

CENTENNIAL GROUP PICNIC AT EAST COBB PARK

We hosted another of our favorite spring/summer activities with our June 2nd, Centennial Group Picnic at East Cobb Park. Highlights included lovely weather, program updates, a great turnout of old & new friends, and yummiest catered sandwiches from Gathering Industries, Inc. (a favorite nonprofit vendor with a wonderful mission. Learn more at gatheringindustries.org)

THANKS FOR OUTINGS!

We add our thanks to all Group and Chapter Outing

Leaders who continued to offer a variety of hikes and educational outings through the spring and early summer. Among our favorites was a special return outing on May 14th to the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park near Macon, with several group leaders and 28 participants.

There is a current campaign to significantly expand the footprint of this historic park into the first ever full-fledged "National Park" in Georgia. We were fortunate that Tracie Nevis, a native member of the Muscogee and Yuchi Tribes, helped lead our awesome guided tour and hike. Tracie is the newly-appointed Director of Outreach at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park. Special thanks to trip organizer Laura Breyfogle.

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER!

Centennial Group is taking a short summer hiatus and will not host regular group meetings/gatherings in July or August, but will keep you posted on any "pop-up" events we hear about. Be sure to check the Chapter calendar regularly for upcoming outings and events: sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar. Please contact Lynn Walston with questions at lynnwalston22@yahoo.com. Have a safe and happy summer!

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial

Facebook: facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club

MeetUp: meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club



Photos courtesy of the Cenennial Group

Bettye Harris and Lynn Walston pose for a photo at the Cobb NAACP Juneteenth celebration (left). Bettye takes a selfie with a group of Sierrans during a recent outing to the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park (right).

GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY CURT THOMPSON, CO-CHAIR, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP, **MICHAEL HALLEN**, CO-CHAIR, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP, & **SCOTT PRESSON**, EXCOM MEMBER, GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

The Greater Gwinnett Group now includes members from Gwinnett, Barrow, Forsyth, Hall, Rockdale, and Walton counties. We are looking to structure our Group monthly meetings to be a hybrid of in-person and virtual to allow members across the Group's region to participate. We normally meet on the first Thursday of the month at 7 PM. We are looking to restart outings with locations in different counties within the Group's region. Do you have suggestions for outings? Contact Sharon Yun at hairimagineer@gmail.com. You can follow us on facebook under the Group name Gwinnett Sierra Club. We hope you can join us as we build our Group community.

The Ready for 100% Gwinnett Team continues to

work with community partners to build support for Gwinnett County and municipal governments within to transition away from fossil fuels and move to clean, renewable energy and a sustainable future. We are working on efforts to push for the county to establish an Office of Sustainability within the county government and to make a commitment to pursue a clean energy future with development of a clean energy and sustainability plan. We are attending meetings of the Gwinnett County Sustainability Commission, as well as building public support such as by tabling at community events. We would like to have members throughout Gwinnett step up to participate in actions to build support for our 100% Gwinnett effort. Contact Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com to learn more.

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 recently held several interesting outings in the past few months. In June, Sierrans toured Willowood Garden to learn more about permaculture.

Permaculture can be understood as the growth of agricultural ecosystems in a self-sufficient and sustainable way. This form of agriculture draws inspiration from nature to develop synergetic farming systems based on crop diversity, resilience, natural productivity, and sustainability. To learn more, visit Willowood Garden at 266 Willowood Road in LaGrange.

In early July, the LaGrange Group visited Grice Garden on Old West Point Road. The lovely home place was bought by Gail and Perry Grice in 2003 and developed into a gardener's and artist's haven. Gail is an accomplished artist, and Perry is the "man who can make it all happen."

The garden features flowers galore, vegetables, herbs, working chickens, a hoop tunnel greenhouse,

compost piles, bird houses, hummingbirds, water feature, and cabana. They share the place with Louie the dog, two indoor cats and an occasional flock of trespassing ducks. Their eight acres backs down to a small spring fed water hole and a nearby lake.

Gail and Perry are the sole laborers and thus a wealth of practical information and insight. This garden tour will delight you!

HIKE WITH US IN SEPTEMBER!

Consider joining us on September 3 for a hike through F.D. Roosevelt State Park in Pine Mountain, Georgia. We'll be hiking the 6.7-mile Wolfden Loop, which features a waterfall and is rated as moderate. We'll stop for a picnic at the waterfall, which is about 2/3rds of the way through the hike. Please wear boots or hiking shoes. Dogs are able to use the trail, but must be kept on a leash.

Register for this hike at bit.ly/WolfdenLoop.

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

GET OUTDOORS!

Metro Atlanta Group outings chair Max Brown led a bird walk in the Okefenokee Swamp in April 2022. On this outing, participants observed red-cockaded woodpeckers, Kentucky warblers, Parula warblers, sandhill cranes, barred owls, and many more animal inhabitants going about their lives within a complex ecosystem. We were heartened to learn of some good news recently for this place: a proposed mining project that threatens the “globally significant” Okefenokee must now go through a federal review process, in a reversal of a previous decision by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (see page 11 for more information). The reason cited for this change? Failure to consult with the Muscogee (Creek) Nation (a federally recognized tribal government) about the fate of this place that is culturally important to the Muscogee people. We send our gratitude to all who are working to protect the Okefenokee against destruction. If you would like to get involved in these efforts with Georgia Sierra Club, please sign up for updates and calls to action from the Chapter’s Wildlands & Wildlife Committee (sierraclub.org/georgia/wildlands).

Right here in metro Atlanta, one place we recommend getting to know right now is Weelaunee (South River) forest. The part of this forest between Key, Constitution, and Bouldercrest roads – where southwest DeKalb County meets southeast Atlanta – is under two threats of destruction:

- The City of Atlanta leased 381 acres of this forested area west of Intrinchment Creek to the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF) to build a massive, regional, militarized training facility. Opponents of the facility call it “Cop City” (as in, #StopCopCity).
- East of the creek is Intrinchment Creek Park. Currently a public park, DeKalb County has agreed to a land swap that would give ownership of forested area of the park to Blackhall Studios in exchange for land that has already been bulldozed. If the swap is completed, Blackhall Studios would clear forest in what is currently Intrinchment Creek Park to build a huge studio complex.

Please check out the Georgia Sierra Club Equity

Committee’s report in this issue of the Sierran for more details on “Cop City”, why it matters, and several ways to get involved in the movements to prevent destruction of the forest and construction of the APF facility (see page 6). For more on the DeKalb/Blackhall land swap, check out recent news coverage from Saporta Report (bit.ly/DeKalbLandSwap), an in-depth feature from Mainline (bit.ly/DeKalbLandSwap2), and the website of Stop the Swap (stoptheswap.org).

In the spirit of getting outside, we recommend visiting the forest if you can! You may begin from the South River Trail Intrinchment Creek Trailhead parking lot. MARTA bus route 32 stops on Bouldercrest close to this entrance. (Coordinates for entrance from W Side Place, 30316: 33.6900, -84.3216.) From the parking lot, you may walk or roll north or south on the paved South River Trail. Going north on the South River Trail, hikers may want to step off the paved trail at mile marker 12 to take a soft forest trail into the woods; take the first right here for a visit to a pine grove known to many admirers as “the living room”. (If you keep going north on the South River Trail, you can get all the way to the Gresham Park recreation center.)

Going south (left) on the paved trail from the Intrinchment Creek Trailhead parking lot, you’ll soon reach the end of the paved trail at a small loop by the remote control aircraft field. Hikers may continue from there on unpaved forest trails going west and then northwest to reach Intrinchment Creek, and walk the intertwined paths parallel to the creek, or find a path down to visit the sandy creekbed.

Stop the Swap has a trail map on their website (click the “visit” button for a trail map). Many of the unpaved trails converge, diverge, and meet again, so you may make a loop route of your own during your visit if you choose. Note: Intrinchment Creek Park is a DeKalb County park open to the public. West of the creek is land leased to the Atlanta Police Foundation; crossing to that side of the forest is considered trespassing under the law.

Read more about the history of the area at bit.ly/ATLPrisonFarmHistory and bit.ly/ATLPrisonFarmHistory2

As you build your relationship with the forest through firsthand experience, as well as through reading about the history of the place, you may find yourself all the more curious about how to help, and all the more passionate about building a positive future alongside others who feel similarly.

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

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!

At our group meeting on April 12, Sierra Club Beyond Coal organizer Neil Sardana presented information on the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) process – through which Georgia Power updates its long-term energy plans, through a series of hearings and revisions presided over by the elected officials of the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC). We discussed how we can use this process as an opportunity to push for clean energy, closure of coal plants, the safe clean up of toxic coal ash, and more. You can take action now and submit a comment to the PSC at

[sc.org/IRP-Action](https://www.sierraclub.org/IRP-Action). The next set of IRP hearings are scheduled for June 21-22. A final decision on the IRP is expected in July 2022.

For our May 10 meeting, Jason Ulseth with Chattahoochee Riverkeeper (chattahoochee.org) conversed with us and Greater Gwinnett Group about the river, how his organization is working to protect the Chattahoochee and its watershed, and how we can get involved to help with that work.

A playlist of video recordings of MAG-hosted meetings is available online at bit.ly/MAG-Playlist.

GROUP INFORMATION

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



SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

We value our volunteers and appreciate when others recognize them for their contributions. Such is the case with Lawrence Komp, whom we call Larr. Different organizations have an Adopt-a-Stream (AAS) program including our own Savannah River Group and the Savannah Riverkeeper. Larr has been active in both SRG and Savannah Riverkeeper's AAS programs and has been recognized by both for his contributions.

- In 2016, Georgia's state AAS program awarded Larr Volunteer of the Year.
- In 2022, Savannah Riverkeeper recognized Larr for his work with and commitment to their AAS, stating he was always there when they needed help.

SRG has an active Adopt-a-Stream (AAS) program where we currently monitor nine sites each month on creeks in Richmond and Columbia counties. Since 2013, Larr has been volunteering with SRG's program and currently helps to monitor all nine sites every month.

Larr's commitment to SRG is represented by the distinct roles he has held that include Outings Leader,

Outings Vice Chair, and Outreach Coordinator. He currently serves on SRG's Executive Committee. Larr also volunteers with the Phinizy Swamp Nature Park leading bicycle tours of the park and helping with their various projects.

Volunteerism runs in his family. Both Larr and his wife Dawn are also activists. Some examples of their activism, either jointly or individually, include the Women's March in Nashville, Augusta's Pride Parade, Augusta's Side With Love demonstration, and providing housing for four fieldworkers in Stacey Abrams' previous campaign for governor. To quote another SRG member, "Some people are keyboard warriors and just talk the talk – they walk the walk!"

Larr is tireless in his volunteer work, but I do not believe that he calls it work. I believe he simply puts on his Big Boots and when he steps out of his house, it becomes an adventure in the making! That's what can happen when you volunteer.

If you're finding yourself inspired by Larr and Dawn's commitments, consider volunteering yourself! We're always ready to welcome new volunteers and help connect your passions and interests with opportunities to take action. Come walk the walk with us!



GROUP INFORMATION

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

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

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PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID



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Change service requested

A large banner for a vehicle donation program. The left side shows a paved road winding through a lush green forest. The right side features a front-facing view of a white Mazda car. A red "DONATE" button is overlaid on the car's front. The text "Give Your Vehicle a New Purpose." is written in white over the forest background, and "Donate Your Vehicle Today!" is written in white over a green bar at the bottom left of the banner.

Give Your Vehicle
a **New Purpose.**

Donate Your Vehicle Today!

The logo for the Sierra Club Foundation Vehicle Donation Program. It includes a small green tree icon to the left of the text "SIERRA CLUB FOUNDATION" in bold, black, sans-serif font. Below this, "VEHICLE DONATION PROGRAM" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

**SIERRA CLUB
FOUNDATION**
VEHICLE DONATION PROGRAM

We make donating your vehicle easy!
1-844-6-SIERRA | scfch.careasy.org

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