

2017 Achievements of the Prince George's Sierra Club Group



Organizational Achievements

The Prince George's Sierra Club's (PGSC) nine-member Executive Committee met monthly in person to conduct business and plan events. These meetings were advertised in Campfire, though were primarily organizational in nature. The Group held three general member meetings, both social and educational, in addition to organizing myriad educational Zero Waste Tours and volunteer-led fieldwork on the foam ban. These additional activities are detailed under Conservation Achievements and the Outings Program:

- The **Holiday Potluck Social and Legislative Briefing** in January at the Watkins Regional Park Nature Center, focusing on upcoming local and state-wide legislation in the coming year, with speakers Matt Perry on the natural wonders of Belt Woods and Mark Posner on Chapter legislative priorities.
- The **Annual Potluck Picnic and Environmental Leadership Award** in June, at Watkins Regional Park. The Award is made annually to a Prince George's public official or activist for environmental leadership in the County.



Participants at the annual picnic enjoyed a raptor demonstration by Park Ranger Paula McNeil and her feathered friends..

- The **Fall Meeting** in September at the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, including a presentation on small-donor public financing by a speaker from Common Cause and a pontoon boat cruise on the Anacostia.

Altogether, nearly 240 different individuals participated in the Group's general meetings, outdoor hikes, zero waste tours, films, data collection, and other events in 2017. Of these participants, about 180 were from Prince George's County.¹

Communications and Outreach. Activities were advertised through HELEN messages to members and lapsed members,² three times per month, by the Group's Communications Chair, Janis Oppelt, and on the Group's website (www.sierraclub.org/maryland/prince-georges), managed by webmaster John Straub. In early June, a flyer advertising the picnic and summer activities was mailed to active members with no email address.



ExCom members gave talks on the Sierra Club, our activities, and legislative program to the Greenbelt Roosevelt Democratic Club, the Riderwood Democratic Club, the College Park Rotary Club, and High Point High School. The Group organized informational booths at Bowiefest (June), Greenbelt Information Day (September), and New Carrollton Day (September).

Left: Janet Gingold explains what goes in the landfill to a visitor at Greenbelt Information Day. The Sierra Club booth won Second Prize at the event.

Collaboration: The Group continued its strong collaboration with the Department of the Environment on the foam ban and other zero waste activities. It also initiated new collaboration with and trained University of Maryland Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) students, environmentalists in Hyattsville, and volunteers in the Montgomery County Sierra Club Group to conduct foam ban monitoring, and trained volunteers in Howard County on conducting a survey of shoppers' reusable bag behavior at grocery stores. It launched collaboration with the Maryland Fair Elections Coalition on public financing of county elections. Members of the Prince George's Group played major leadership roles in three key Chapter activities – organization of the bi-annual Jamboree (Sydney Jacobs, Nick Orrick), mobilization for the People's Climate March (Na'ilah Dawkins), and service on the Elections Committee for the Chapter and Group ExCom in fall 2017 (Martha Ainsworth, Eric McKenzie, Janis Oppelt).

¹ Number to be updated with those who engaged in foam monitoring and 1-2 additional hikes.

² These go only to those with an email address and who do not have a "no email" flag in their record.

Awards. The PGSC's **2017 Environmental Leadership Award**, presented annually to a County resident for excellence in environmental leadership, went to clean water advocate Marian Dombroski, of Cheverly. The award recognizes her leadership in engaging communities along the Anacostia River and its tributaries on clean water issues. "What stands out about Marian is her ability to reach out and work with the community, to help make the link between healthy rivers and quality of life, to engage the community as activists who take ownership of clean water and become stewards in the long run," said Martha Ainsworth, Chair of the PGSC Group. The press release was featured as the front page article in the *Prince George's Post*.



Marian Dombroski celebrates the Environmental Leadership Award with community water activists.

In September 2017, the National Sierra Club awarded PGSC Chair Ainsworth a **Sierra Club Special Service Award**, which honors members for their strong and consistent commitment to conservation or the Club over an extended period of time. Sierra Club President Loren Blackford cited Ainsworth's "outstanding leadership skills, sharp intellect, fierce tenacity, and organizational savvy on behalf of the Sierra Club in Maryland." She was nominated by Group members and local officials, recognizing the increased number of events and activities to re-engage existing members and attract new volunteers under her leadership. The story was published in the *Bowie Blade News*.



Martha Ainsworth receives the Special Service award from National SC President Loren Blackford and Executive Director Michael Brune.

Conservation Achievements

The Group's 2017 Conservation Priorities continued to emphasize Zero Waste (including adoption of Zero Waste policies by County government and promoting better implementation of laws already on the books, especially the foam ban), and conserving Belt Woods Natural Environment Area, whose management plan is currently under development by the Department of Natural Resources/Maryland Park Service.

Zero Waste

- The Group organized **educational tours** for members and the public to the county's single-stream recycling facility, landfill, and the private rubblefill. It also co-organized promoted participation in a tour of the Montgomery County incinerator and dual-stream recycling facility, a landfill in Howard County, and the BRESKO trash incinerator in Baltimore.



- There was progress on a **Zero Waste Strategies** document under preparation by the County Department of Environment, to which PGSC contributed detailed comments and served on a committee to incorporate those comments into a final draft document. The County abandoned incineration as a solution to the waste problem, succeeded in procuring budgetary resources for three new inspectors, and dropped expansion of a fly-ash landfill in the 10-year Solid Waste Management Plan (the latter based on detailed PGSC comments).
- PGSC launched an effort in spring 2017 to **educate businesses and monitor compliance with the foam ban** in the county's shopping centers, reaching 465 businesses in 45 north- and central-county shopping centers, with a compliance rate of 76%. Volunteers returned in October to businesses previously found to have foam; the compliance rate had risen to 91%. Two members of the ExCom testified on the Prince George's foam ban compliance to the House Environment and Transportation Committee in October. As foam ban compliance in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties is entirely complaint-based, the county governments have no systematic data on the compliance rates. Data collected by the Prince George's Group is the only information in existence, and has now spread to the Montgomery County Group.

*Below: A business woman displays new paper and plastic containers that replaced foam containers.
Right: Na'ilah Dawkins pilots monitoring of recycling and trash at Bowiefest.*



- The Group testified in favor of CB-8-2017, the County's **recycling at special events** bill, which required side-by-side trash and recycling receptacles at all special events with at least 100 participants. To support implementation of the law, the Group launched a new activity for volunteers – monitoring of recycling and trash bins at public events, which was field tested at Bowiefest. This activity will be expanded next year to volunteer at future large events to help support implementation of the current county and state laws on recycling at special events.



Belt Woods. PGSC Group leaders conducted field visits to five of the state's six Natural Environment Areas (NEAs) to collect data on the management of other NEAs, and prepared comments on the first and final draft of the Belt Woods Natural Environment Area Strategic Management Plan (Dept of Natural Resources/Maryland Park Service). To raise awareness of the area and its assets, the keynote speaker at the holiday potluck social (Dr. Matthew Perry) spoke specifically to the history and wonders of the old growth forest of Belt Woods, located at Church Road and Central Avenue, in Bowie.

Other conservation actions

- **Land Use:** The Prince George’s Group provided testimony and/or written comments in opposition to: the Melford Village Preliminary Plan in Bowie, a dense development next to the Patuxent River and far from mass transit; an amendment of the Subregion 5 Master Plan in South County that would have opened 2,000 acres in the former rural tier and in the Mattawoman Creek floodplain to dense development, and an amendment of the Greater Cheverly Sector Plan that would have expanded the “core” of the area to be redeveloped to include parklands in the floodplain of Lower Beaverdam Creek maintained by the community as green space.
- **State-wide fracking ban:** The Chair calculated the number of drinking water wells potentially affected by fracking in Allegany and Garrett counties; many members participated in the anti-fracking rally in Annapolis. Beyond this, Group members testified in favor of approval of two off-shore wind projects before the Public Services Commission.



- **Climate Change:** Na’ilah Dawkins served as PGSC organizer for the People’s Climate March. To generate interest, the Group sponsored two screenings of “Before the Flood,” in Laurel and College Park.

Outings Program

The outings program showed considerable growth in 2017, emphasizing connections with wild places close to home. Hikes were held in the Patuxent Wildlife Research Refuge, Watkins Regional Park, Merkle Wildlife Management Area, Jug Bay Natural Environment Area, Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area, and along the Anacostia River from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park to the Aquatic Gardens. On the eight scheduled hikes, group size ranged from 5 to 16, with an average of 8. There were 57 unique participants, including 26 residents of Prince George’s County and others from elsewhere in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.³

Participants experienced close encounters in woodland habitats with opportunities to appreciate the biodiversity of plant life in our region. Highlights included finding interesting native plants, watching a bald eagle fly over the beaver pond at Watkins Park, discovering a mystery reptile egg under tree roots at Jug Bay, and savoring the fall colors at Soldiers Delight.

Outings Chairs Lauren Ragsac and Janet Gingold mentored future outings leaders. Prior to moving out of the area, Lauren helped Janet learn the ropes as an outings leader.

³ Numbers to be updated based on end-of-year totals, including the Anacosita hike in December. Compare with MA’s table.



Janet, in turn, became the Group's new Outings Chair and helped out with outings leader training in November. She is mentoring three new outings-leader trainees who will be completing their requirements for certification. We look forward to helping more people spend more time outdoors during the coming year

Political Program

Anticipating the launch of the endorsement process for the 2018 elections, the Chair of the Group Political Committee (Nick Orrick) pushed to get the Chapter to adopt a Standing Rule on the operation of the Political Committee and the endorsement process. Subsequently, the Prince George's Group adopted its own Standing Rule to improve the transparency of its own endorsement process. These two Standing Rules were particularly important, as the National Sierra Club Guidelines pertain primarily to the criteria for endorsements, but much less on how the endorsement process should be conducted. There has been confusion in the past in the Chapter and Group about participation and selection of individuals to participate in the endorsement process.

Working with Clean Water Action and the Maryland League of Conservation Voters, the Group Political Committee contributed to development of a questionnaire for state legislative candidates and, subsequently, on its own developed a candidate questionnaire for County Council and County Executive. Members of the Political Committee and designated volunteers are involved in reviewing the completed questionnaires and conducting interviews of candidates running for 8 state Senate, 25 state Delegate, 11 County Council, and one County Executive races. This was launched in fall 2017 and will continue in early 2018.

The Group launched a campaign for adoption of a small-donor public financing program for county elections (Council and Executive) that would give grassroots candidates a better chance at competing and reduce the influence of big money in the election. Similar programs have been adopted in Montgomery and Howard Counties and one is under consideration in the District of Columbia. A Prince George's bill will be introduced in January 2018.

