



**SIERRA
CLUB**

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

EXPLORE – ENJOY - PROTECT

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Virtual Outing

Join a Maryland Master Naturalist and other nature enthusiasts for a virtual visit to Cedarville State Forest and other favorite spots to go visit with wild things. Saturday, December 12, at 4 PM. Register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000001kUFkAAM>



Environmental Book Discussions

Our Environmental Book Group meets virtually each month to discuss books about nature, environmental advocacy and social justice. Come share your ideas! All are welcome! The December discussion will be about Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder*, on Dec. 15 at 7:30 PM. Register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000001kVioAAE> The January selection is *Politics is for Power* on Jan. 26 at 7:30 PM. Register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000001kUZIAA2>

What's next?

With the Presidential Election fading in the rear view mirror, the road ahead looks somewhat less perilous. Still, we have a lot of work to do to as the coronavirus pandemic rages on, climate change accelerates, and our country remains so deeply divided. As a grassroots organization, the Sierra Club needs volunteers to help forge a new path in these difficult times—to deepen the movement for a liveable planet, safer communities, and a democracy that works for everyone. On Nov. 14, Sierra Club members were sent an email about voting in the election for the Sierra Club officers who shape organizational priorities. Be sure to vote! Votes must be cast by December 11. If you didn't receive that email, contact anne.s.odonnell@gmail.com. To check if your membership is current, go to myaccount.sierraclub.org. Even though the pandemic currently limits our in-person activities, we continue our work virtually. We need help for teams working on zero waste, climate action, transportation and communications, as well as organizing our ongoing monthly virtual outings and environmental book discussions. If you want to get more involved in exploring, enjoying and protecting the Prince George's County environment, contact Janet.Gingold@mdsierra.org.



What’s next for Waste Reduction and Recycling in Prince George’s County?

By Martha Ainsworth

While we continue to encourage the County Council to adopt a Zero Waste Plan in 2021, with goals and a costed, prioritized, timeline to achieve them, there has been important progress recently and there are good prospects in 2021 for source reduction, composting, and recycling, through local or state legislation.

Reducing single-use plastic

[Maryland’s Zero Waste Plan](#) advocates banning products that are not readily recyclable for technical or economic reasons, including frequently littered items. Prince George’s County took a first bold step in this direction, [banning the sale and provision of food in expanded polystyrene \(foam\) food containers](#) in 2016. Then, in July 2020 the County’s [ban on straws that are not home-compostable](#) went into effect; plastic straws, whether from petroleum-based or plant-based polymers, will not break down into compost when littered. There are widely available alternatives for foam food containers and plastic straws, and they represent a disproportionate amount of litter, contributing to plastic pollution and its environmental impacts.

What’s next?

Montgomery County has just expanded its ban on polystyrene foam to include **all polystyrene food containers**, such as #6 plastic cups, clamshells, and cup lids. Prince George’s could follow suit. Polystyrene containers are not accepted by the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) because there’s no market for recycled polystyrene. Any #6 plastic in your recycling bin is a source of contamination and will end up in the landfill.



If you’ve been ordering home-delivery of meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, you probably already have a huge supply of single-use plastic utensils that you didn’t ask for and don’t need. Howard County will be considering a bill requiring restaurants to provide **straws, stirrers, plastic utensils, and condiment packages** only if the customer requests them. With a similar law, Prince George’s County could reduce these single-use items by 30-40% and save businesses money.

At the state level, the Plastic Bag Reduction Act would ban **single-use plastic carryout bags** state-wide, reducing a major source of litter and environmental damage. It passed the House of Delegates and the Senate Finance Committee this year but missed a vote on the Senate floor because of the shortened session. It will be reintroduced in 2021.

Improving Recycling, Expanded Composting

The County is in the process of acquiring an **optical sorter** to sort plastic by resin, raising the value of what is marketed. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down installation of the equipment, but it is

anticipated in 2021. Learn more about this on the [December 4th Virtual Tour of the Prince George's Materials Recycling Facility](#) (MRF). The County will also be expanding **curbside food waste collection** to 3,000 households in early 2021, and ultimately county-wide.

What's next?

Two bills in the 2021 General Assembly would shift the cost of recycling from the County (and its taxpayers) to producers. A **paint stewardship** bill would require paint manufacturers (via a non-profit organization, Paint Care), to manage the collection, reuse, recycling, or safe disposal of architectural paint. The program, already operational in nine states, greatly increases access to drop-off centers and is financed by a fee for each paint container. Another bill would **require packaging producers to finance recycling of their products**.

To join the Prince George's Sierra Club zero waste team, contact Martha.Ainsworth@mdsierra.org, and join the zero waste team listserv at www.sierraclub.org/maryland/zero-waste.

Recycling Tour

Find out what happens to the stuff you put in your recycling bin during a virtual tour of the Prince George's County Materials Recycling Facility. Come get the latest about what can and can't be recycled and learn about the new optical scanner technology. December 4 at 9 AM. Register at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q000001bMJuAAM>



Baltimore-Washington Superconducting Maglev back in action

By Janet Gingold

Several members of the Maryland Sierra Club Transportation Committee recently met with representatives of Northeast Maglev and Baltimore-Washington Rapid Rail to learn more about the plan to deploy the 311 mph [SCMAGLEV train](#) in the Northeast corridor. The promoters described the Northeast Maglev as an innovative, green transportation option that would carry passengers at 311



mph, travelling from DC to New York in an hour, decreasing intercity trips by cars, and using less energy per seat than traditional automobile or air travel.

Decades in the making, the plan for the [initial segment](#) of the SCMAGLEV downtown Washington, DC to downtown Baltimore, has stimulated significant local opposition because of the environmental disruption it would cause along its route, both during construction and during operation, with little perceived benefit for those most affected by the disruption. It had been put on “pause” but has recently been reactivated. The draft environmental impact statement is currently being evaluated by the 15 federal, 9 state, and 13 local governmental agencies involved; it will be available for public review and comment during the first quarter of 2021. Building the initial segment would take 5-10 years. Achieving the vision of functioning high-speed rail service from DC to New York would take significantly longer.

As we evaluate the potential impact of this project, we need to sort out what it would and would not do – to the land, the air, the water, the people, the flora and fauna, the economy. Then we need to sort out how the possible benefits compare with the costs, and how to weigh those costs and benefits with our values. This is not easy. Readers are encouraged to dive in to the [documents](#) provided at the project website to find out about the technology, electricity demands on the Maryland grid, the tunnel-boring process, the truckloads of muck that would need transporting to destinations unknown, 180-acre rolling stock depot, noise and its abatement, and numerous other technical challenges. Safety also must be considered.

[Project Drawdown](#) describes [high-speed rail](#) as one of many solutions that might help decrease greenhouse gas emissions and avert climate catastrophe. David Roberts has written that addressing climate change will demand “[ugly trade-offs](#).” We know our current infrastructure is inadequate and we can’t meet our greenhouse gas reduction goals without new and better transportation infrastructure. What will high-efficiency, zero emission intercity transportation look like? How do we get from here to there without perpetuating environmental injustice and destroying precious islands of biodiversity in our sea of urban sprawl?

*They took all the trees
Put ‘em in a tree museum
And they charge the people
A dollar and a half just to see ‘em.
Don’t it always seem to go,
That you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s
gone?
They paved paradise
Put up a parking lot.*

–Joni Mitchell



Owen A. Kelley of Greenbelt has put the growing things of the [Greenbelt Forest Preserve](#) into a time capsule in his book, [A Hundred Wild Things: A Field Guide to Plants in the Greenbelt North Woods](#).

This 200-acre patch of green has survived many threats of development in the decades since it was set aside for preservation by the City of Greenbelt. It occupies the area where the SCMAGLEV from Washington would travel out of its tunnel onto its elevated guideway enroute to Baltimore. This spot is not “old-growth forest” but it includes some fine old trees and a remarkably diverse community of living things. It is a place where local residents can enjoy a wander amidst wild growing things and contemplate how nature changes with the seasons, transforms and evolves. Should Greenbelt residents be expected to it be sacrifice their hard-won green space to build a train they would not use? How many local jobs and how much greenhouse gas reduction might make that sacrifice worthwhile?

I use my copy of *A Hundred Wild Things* to help identify plants as I see on my visits to natural places near home. I hope it won’t become just a fragile reminder of what is gone. --JG

Federal, state and local elected officials will be developing their positions about this project as more details emerge with the DEIS. They will need to know where their constituents stand. As we approach the public comment period for the DEIS, we invite you to share your thoughts by submitting a short essay for the Issues Forum on the Prince George's Sierra Club web page. We expect these pieces to show a diversity of thought about a complex issue. Articles are edited for space and clarity; they do not necessarily represent the position of the Sierra Club. Send submissions to Janet.Gingold@mdsierra.org.

**Find out more about activities of the
Prince George's County Sierra Club at**
<https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/prince-georges>

What's next in Brandywine?

By Janet Gingold



Clean Air Prince George's volunteers getting the word out about the Mattawoman Energy power plant, November 2020.

Our neighbors in Brandywine have more than their share of polluting fossil fuel infrastructure, including a coal ash landfill and four power plants within a 13-mile radius. The Mattawoman Energy Company, LLC plans to build a fifth power plant just East of Rte. 301 and just South of Brandywine Road. This 990-MW plant would be fueled by natural gas from a 7.6-mile pipeline that would run from Charles County, through the headwaters of Mattawoman Creek and the Zekiah Swamp and through parts of Cedarville State

Forest. On November 4, the Maryland Public Service Commission met to consider an amendment to Mattawoman Energy's Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity to allow dewatering to enable construction of the pipeline. With the help of a [report](#) from Downstream Strategies, [Clear Air Prince George's](#), the Sierra Club and other members of the public argued against approving the dewatering because of potential harm to sensitive habitats, as well as because of the wider issues of greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental injustice of clustering of polluting industries. The PSC agreed to evaluate the deficiencies in the proposed amendment and reconsider the issue on Dec. 9. The comments from those who responded to the Sierra Club Action Alert helped make the case against immediate approval. Clean Air Prince George's continues with local public education, community outreach, and advocacy to stop the building of yet another power plant in this already overburdened community. [Follow this issue](#) and add your voice against new fossil fuel infrastructure in Prince George's County.

What's next for Climate Action in Prince George's County?

By Janet Gingold

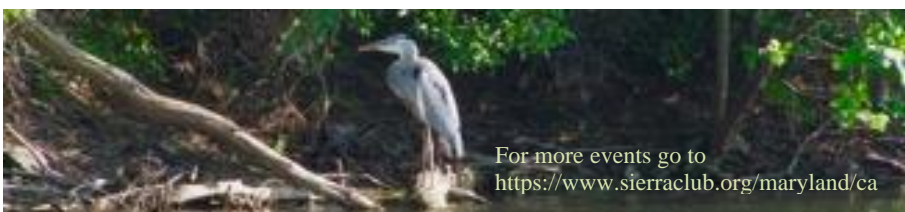
Prince George's County has established a Climate Action Plan Commission to create a Climate Action Plan by Fall of 2021. The Commission is led by the Director of the Department of the Environment, Joe Gill. The plan will include strategies for decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and also increasing community resilience in the face of the changes that are expected to occur. The Commission includes representatives from the County Council, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, the Office of Central Services, the Health Department, MNCPPC Planning Department, the Department of Public Works and Transportation, the Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement, Prince George's County Public Schools, the University of Maryland, Bowie State University, the County Municipal Association, and the energy industry. The three representatives from environmental or social justice groups are Gary Allen (Maryland Forestry Foundation), Henry Cole (Clean Air Prince George's), and Janet Gingold (Prince George's Sierra Club).

The County Climate Action Plan Commission meets virtually each month. Facilitated by the Cadmus Group experts in climate mitigation adaptation planning, the Commission is establishing work groups for (1) mitigation, (2) adaptation and resilience, and (3) communication and outreach. Successful implementation of a County Climate Action Plan will require public input and support. Prince George's County residents should follow the formation of the Climate Action Plan, share information with friends and neighbors, and participate in public outreach activities. Meetings of the Commission can be streamed from the County Council video webpage. The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 18 at 1 PM.


The Prince George's County Sierra Club's Climate Action Committee (PGSC-CAC) meets twice a month to share findings about other jurisdictions' climate action plans and to discuss ideas about the evolving County Climate Action Plan. In addition to researching options and strategies, the Climate Action Committee helps to plan engaging activities like our recent panel discussion, "Climate Action in the Time of Coronavirus" with County Council Member Deni Taveras, Delegate Julian Ivey and Climate Reality Leaders Ron Kaltenbaugh and Janet Gingold, as well as our Climate Jeopardy game. If you would like to participate in the PGSC-CAC, or contribute a blog on climate mitigation or adaptation strategies for our Issues Forum contact Janet.Gingold@mdsierra.org.

To share your observations, experience and wisdom in the online Issues Forum or the next Newsletter, contact Janet.Gingold@mdsierra.org

For more information about the activities of the Prince George's Sierra Club, visit <https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/prince-georges>



For more events go to
<https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/ca>

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