

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY SIERRA CLUB

Explore. Enjoy. Protect.

Environmental Book Group

[August 18 at 7 PM](#)

[September 15 at 7 PM](#)

The Prince George's County Environmental Book Group meets monthly (by Zoom) to discuss books on a variety of environmental topics. On August 18 at 7 PM, Janis Oppelt will lead a discussion [The Thing with Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human](#) by Noah Strycker. <https://bit.ly/2ENaQBg>

On September 15, Nick Orrick will lead a discussion of [Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming](#) by Paul Hawken. <https://bit.ly/3i8mGuz>

Fall Membership Meeting

[Saturday October 17, 3-5 PM](#)

SAVE THE DATE! Fall membership meeting and panel discussion about Climate Action.

"When you see something that is not right, not just, not fair, you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, 'What did you do? What did you say?'"

**--Congressman John Lewis,
February 21, 1940 – July 17, 2020**

Let's Make Some Good Trouble

by Sydney Jacobs

I'm sitting at my computer, cup of coffee to the right; on the left an open window to the outside where the chattering of blue jays and sparrows drifts in with the growing summer humid air. In the background, soaring voices of praise from Congressman John Lewis' funeral service mark the end of an era. The passing of one of the last 20th century Civil Rights icons comes at a time of intersecting, unprecedented events in the history of the United States. What do we, as individuals, as members in our community, and as environmentalists, do with this moment to "get in good trouble?"

As an individual, I believe this time is an opportunity to confront my own ignorance and biases about my fellow human beings, and to do so fearlessly. Almost every day, I learn something new about the truth of our deeply problematic history. I seek out the lived stories of people of color and other marginalized humans so that I may better understand how a society that has given me so many benefits has inflicted harm on others. I am committed to the journey of being an anti-racist.

“Let’s Make Good...” cont’d:

As a member of a larger community, I’m trying to recognize the connections issues have to each other and the links that bind all of humanity together. Healthcare injustice, growing wealth disparities, unequal education opportunities, police and prison brutality, and an erosion of voting rights, are all linked to how we solve the existential threat of climate change.

For too long, many environmentalists have acted as if “our issues” stand apart from the social and economic injustices that have become so apparent to the world this year. If we wish to honor John Lewis and his call to “get in trouble”, our Sierra Club community needs to listen to, learn from, and support these other struggles. See you on the front lines!

*“Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in **good trouble**, necessary trouble.” from a tweet by John Lewis, June 2018.*

More Nature Finds Near Home

August 22 at 4 PM

Got questions or ideas about where to go to connect with nature near home? Join us for an hour of show-and-tell with others who seek solace among the wild things. <https://bit.ly/3i1pDNi>

Prince George’s Group Climate Action Committee meeting

August 11 at 5 PM

The Climate Action Committee of the Prince George’s Sierra Club will meet virtually to examine climate action plans of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and other jurisdictions, Drawdown recommendations, and actions of the Prince George’s County Government that affect greenhouse gas emissions and development of resiliency to adapt to the effects of Climate Change. The committee will provide input for shaping the Prince George’s County Climate Action Plan to be developed by the County’s new Climate Action Plan Commission. **New volunteers are needed for this important work.** <https://bit.ly/3kbHMtB>



Silver-spotted Skipper. *Epargyreus clarus*

HELP WANTED
The PGCSC Group is looking for a volunteer Sierra Club member to join the Executive Committee to serve through 2020. ExCom meets monthly and makes decisions for the Group, including planning Group activities and developing positions on local environmental issues. We are particularly in need of a person with an interest in local efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. If you are interested please contact janet.gingold@mdsierra.org.

Beltway Expansion Environmental Impact Statement Released



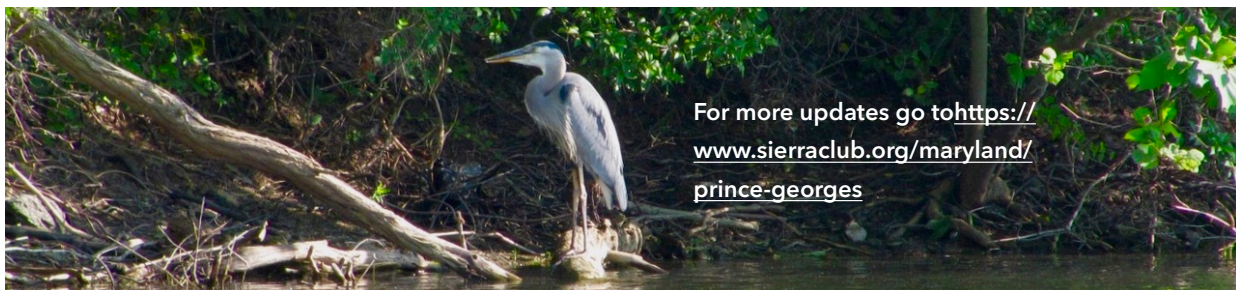
By Nick Orrick, Prince George's representative to the Maryland Chapter Transportation Committee

In the midst of the pandemic, the Hogan administration is moving forward with its [plan to widen I-495 and I-270](#) using a public-private partnership to finance the project. The possible alternatives have been winnowed down to two; both would involve construction of two new lanes each way on Maryland's section of the Capital Beltway and I-270. Four consortia have been identified who could bid on the project. Each will be provided money to develop a specific plan and to prepare a bid.

On July 10, the [Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) (DEIS) was made available. The main text has 300 pages, and the appendices are many times as large. Not surprisingly, the environmental impacts could be huge. Designs are driven by the goal of reducing and mitigating the impacts, but that doesn't mean that the impacts have gone away. Numerous parks and historic properties in Prince George's County, from Buck Lodge to Henson Creek abut the construction area. Stormwater management will be affected, with many new acres of impervious surfaces sending polluted highway runoff into our waterways. Other impacts include the destruction of 1500 acres of forest. By law, these trees must be replaced nearby, but the large trees can be replaced with small ones and there is very limited land available in the urbanized area near the Beltway to plant this many trees. Moreover, more lanes will mean more vehicle miles travelled, which means more air pollution in already overburdened communities and more greenhouse gas emissions.

The largest flaw that I see is that the State Highway Administration decided up front that increases in population and economic activity in the region will inevitably result in an increase in traffic on these highways. Therefore, only plans that increase the capacity of the Interstates were considered. It was not considered that efforts to address the climate crisis must include reducing traffic on our highways.

We have 90 days to comment on the DEIS though efforts are being made increase this to 120 days because of the pandemic. The Sierra Club Maryland Chapter, assisted by legal experts, is studying the huge document to evaluate the analysis and its legal ramifications. Feedback from individuals is also essential. Input is most effective when it includes information about how the project will affect you and your family. You can [review the DEIS](#) and send comments using this [Action Alert](#) or send longer comments directly through the [project website](#).



For more updates go to [https://
www.sierraclub.org/maryland/
prince-georges](https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/prince-georges)

Wondering While Wandering

By Janet Gingold

Each Spring in the heart of Prince George's County, just before the leaves unfurl and block the sunlight, ephemeral flowers make a brief but spectacular appearance on the forest floor at Watkins Park. As you walk along the trail to the beaver pond, you pass a multitude of spring beauties with scattered bloodroot and patches of cut-leaved toothwort, violets and Virginia saxifrage. In one special spot, a crowd of Dutchman's breeches covers a gentle wooded slope, with patches of pale corydalis and a scattering of yellow trout lilies guarded by jack-in-the-pulpits that spring up here and there. Most of those flowers depend on insects - not only bees or flies for pollinating the flowers, but also ants for disseminating their seeds.



Figure 1. Dutchman's breeches with tiger swallowtail at Watkins Park, April 2017

In summer, the sturdy oak and hickory and tulip trees have closed the canopy above, and pawpaw, holly and hornbeam crowd the understory. I remember the ephemerals each time I pass the spot and look forward to their reappearance next year.

After a heavy June rain, I noticed that sandy soil had washed down over that gentle slope, covering much of the area where the Dutchman's breeches bloom each spring. Will they bloom again next year?

Just uphill from this bend in the trail, a farm field recently acquired by the park is still under cultivation. Wheat planted there this spring has yielded thick golden spikes and now soybean plants are flowering. Downhill, a narrow ravine leads down to a creek that feeds into the wetland and pond below. Seeing how the rain had washed that soil from the field down that wooded slope and over the edge of that ravine made me wonder what else might also have washed into our flowerbed and down to the rich habitat created by the beavers. How might chemicals applied to that field affect this precious island of wildness in our sea of suburbia?



Figure 2 Slaty skimmer on wheat at Watkins Park, July 2020

I hope that our County Council will tighten restrictions on pesticide use in parks - including for agriculture. I worry about those ephemeral flowers and the ants who plant their seeds. And the people who follow this trail through the deep green of summer looking for comfort in the music of the birds and the frogs. These days life seems so fragile.

ENSURING A SAFE AND FAIR ELECTION

The election in November 2020 is a crucial crossroads for our country. Never has it been more important for our electoral process to be fair and transparent. Never has it been more important for citizens to express their will through the ballot box and for every vote to be counted. With changes in the voting process required because of the COVID19 pandemic, each voter must take extra responsibility to understand how the new system works and be sure that our votes get counted. The [Prince George's County Board of Elections](#) encourages all voters to vote by mail. The deadline for registering to vote is 5 PM on October 13, 2020.

Governor Hogan's current plan is to have both mail-in and in-person voting. Unlike in the primary when all voters received ballots in the mail, casting a mail-in ballot will require a two-step process. All voters will be sent an application for an absentee ballot but only those who apply for an absentee ballot will receive one in the mail. Absentee ballots can also be requested on line. To avoid problems with delayed or lost absentee ballots, ballots should be requested well in advance.

When voters know how the system works, fewer ballots will go uncounted. During the primary election, some mail-in ballots could not be counted because they arrived in an envelope that was not signed by the voter or was not properly post-marked. Another potential barrier could occur when ballots are processed by poll workers. Paper ballots are fed through an optical scanner that automatically reads the voter's choices. The machines only work with the official ballot. If a voter sends in a ballot that they printed out on regular printer paper, poll workers must copy the voter's choices onto an official ballot prior to scanning it. This extra step introduces an additional place where an error could occur.

Your vote this November is more important than ever. Be sure to follow this issue carefully and share accurate information with friends and family to ensure that everyone votes and all votes get counted.

--Janet Gingold, Chair, Prince George's Sierra Club

"Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily..." from the National Museum of African American History and Culture, [Talking About Race](#).

***"If not us, then who?
If not now, then
when?"***
—John Lewis

"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." Barack Obama, Feb 5, 2008
