



SIERRA CLUB

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GROUP

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW

Overview

In 2021, the Prince George's County Sierra Club's in-person activities were still curtailed by the coronavirus pandemic, but we adapted by increasing proficiency with, and use of, on-line participation tools. We focused on the County's Climate Action Plan, Zero Waste initiatives, advocacy for better land-use policy, and expanding our communications through use of social media. In addition to monthly meetings of our Executive Committee, Climate Action Team, and Zero Waste Team, we hosted 25 events scheduled on Campfire, which attracted 491 registrants with at least 219 participants recorded. Overall, 380 unique people registered for our events.

Climate Action

Our first priority for 2021 was to support Prince George's County's Climate Action Commission in its development of the climate action plan. The Climate Action team met 1-2 times/month to share information and develop strategies for increasing community engagement in the process. Janet Gingold, PGSC Chair, served on the County's Climate Action Commission. PGSC Climate Action team members were

instrumental in recruiting local experts to serve on the Resident Advisory Group and publicizing the community meetings and the public comment period to the raise awareness among the general public as well as other environmental advocates. PGSC Climate Action Team members Joseph Jakuta, James Lawson, Lore Rosenthal, Maureen Fine, and Ben Fischler served on the Resident Advisory Committee providing crucial input on the blueprints for the 26 priority recommendations. PGSC also featured climate action prominently in emails to members, in the Quarterly Newsletter and in the online Issues Forum. PGSC hosted three virtual educational events as well as four book discussions about climate change. During the public comment period in November, PGSC members publicized the comment period through emails to members, social media and two media interviews. We also distributed handouts with information about the comment period. Sierra Club members' comments were prominent among the



comments, both in the oral comment sessions and in the written comments sent in support of the plan.

The Prince George's County Climate Parents campaign, led by ExCom member Joseph Jakuta, achieved success by seeing through the adoption of a resolution committing Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) to phase out fossil fuels and waste streams by 2040. Jakuta also was asked to co-chair the Climate Change Action Plan Focus Workgroup that was charged with developing a plan to implement the zero fossil fuel and waste goals. The Workgroup has met twelve times and has completed its fact finding. The plan is expected to be introduced for a vote by the PGC Board of Education in the Spring of 2022. There is also an advocacy effort underway to have PGCPS create a "sustainability/resiliency officer" position to implement the plan once it is adopted.

Zero Waste

The Zero Waste Team focused on three campaigns in 2021 – reducing single-use plastic, expanding food scrap composting, and conducting an inventory of artificial turf playing fields in the County to calculate their future waste burden. The Team engaged not only members and leaders from the County leadership, but also from the County's 27 municipalities, home to about a quarter of the County's population and that manage their own waste, recycling, and composting activities.

In October the Team organized a discussion of "Plastic Pollution and Solutions in Prince George's County," with a link to the Emmy Award-winning documentary *The Story of Plastic* as background.

The objective of the event was to educate County and municipal leaders and the public on plastic pollution, the impact of plastic production on climate change, and what can be done about it. Panelists were the Director of the Department of the Environment, a County Council member, the President of the Anacostia Watershed Society, and an expert from the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators. Among the 40 participants were mayors, City Council members, municipal green teams, and Climate Commissioners. Coming out of the meeting, the Team is working with three municipalities on legislation to ban plastic bags and/or reduce the use of single-use plastics, in early 2022.



In December the Team convened a "Roundtable on Municipal Food Scrap Composting Options," in partnership with Sustainable Maryland. Fewer than half of the County's municipalities have ongoing efforts to compost food scraps, which, when left in the landfill, generate methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. The increase of the landfill tipping fee from \$59/ton to \$70/ton in October presented an opportunity to divert food scraps from the landfill, reduce future methane emissions, and save money. A panel of providers of backyard



composting, food scrap drop-off, and curbside collection programs presented the options for municipalities, while a second panel of officials from municipalities with ongoing programs described the costs, the impacts, and lessons learned. The event put providers and municipalities in touch with each other and generated a dialogue across municipalities on the benefits and logistics of the programs. It also put municipalities in contact with the County's Organics Composting Facility (with a tipping fee of only \$45/ton for food scraps), a source of technical support. The ZW team also promoted expansion of the county's curbside food scrap pick-up program for unincorporated areas.



The Team's third major activity was to conduct an inventory of artificial turf playing fields to estimate the amount of waste that will be generated when they wear out and have to



be replaced (about 10 years). No one knows how many of these fields are in Maryland, but the average field is comprised of 40,000 lb of plastic carpet and 400,000 lb of infill (in most cases, ground tires and silicate). The team counted a total of 26 fields in Prince George's County, 16 of which were at public schools, 6 of which were at public parks, and 4 of which were at private schools. When they are replaced over the next decade, they will

generate an estimated 6,865 tons of waste that for the most part is not recyclable; most components end up landfilled, stockpiled, or illegally dumped. The results with those from other counties will be used to lobby for a first-in-the nation bill to require a "chain of custody" for all artificial turf fields, from the manufacturer, to the owner, to the manner and place of disposal, posted on the Maryland Department of the Environment website.

Team members also conducted research into the performance of the County's efforts to reduce illegal dumping and to create a reuse and repair park for gently used furniture and other durable goods sent to the landfill. In late fall, the Team launched an action alert to forestall the County Executive's proposal to return to twice-a-week trash collection, a \$30 million project over five years that would undermine recycling and food scrap collection and the greenhouse-gas reduction policies in the Climate Action Plan.

Transportation

The PGSC Transportation Committee joined with other local environmental advocates in opposition to the Maglev train between Washington and Baltimore and met with representatives from the National Sierra Club to help develop a national position on this

issue. While SC supports high-speed intercity rail, this project would provide no benefit to the people who would bear the burden of the environmental impacts of its construction and operation. The project has equity problems with its high ticket prices and negative impact on Environmental Justice communities. It also has potential adverse effects on Amtrak and MARC, which provide essential transportation services for local commuters. It also would set a dangerous precedent by turning over federal preserved land to private interests. Finally, the unique Patuxent Wildlife Research Preserve could be compromised. PGSC transportation committee members participated in MD Chapter Transportation Committee's monthly meetings, including discussion of transportation legislative priorities.

Political Committee

The Political Committee recruited new members to participate in the process for endorsing candidates for the 2022 election. The group developed new questionnaire for County Council candidates and interviewed candidates for the special election in District 8, though the short time frame made endorsement from two levels of the club not feasible. We used emails to members, social media posts and an action alert to generate opposition to a controversial redistricting map but the map was adopted despite 150+ people signing up to testify against it.

Land Use and Natural Places

In addition to advocating for stronger land use regulations through the Climate Action Plan, we participated in several advocacy efforts regarding threats to local forested areas. Despite strong opposition from local residents and testimony from the Sierra Club and the National Park Conservation Foundation, a forested area in Forest Heights was rezoned for mixed use development, paving the way for the proposed National View Project. Efforts to save Guilford Woods, adjacent to the University of Maryland campus in College Park, included meetings, support of the stewardship activities of Friends of Guilford Woods, tours of the woods with local advocates and elected officials, and a letter writing campaign targeted to the President of the University. At a rally on campus, numerous advocates spoke for building housing elsewhere and conserving the woods as a special natural area and sign-carrying demonstrators marched a petition from McKeldin Library to the Administration



Building. University officials changed course and decided not to pursue the sale of the land. Further work needs to be done to ensure the woods is protected in perpetuity. ExCom member James Lawson engaged with residents of Fort Washington who were protesting the levelling of a mature forest near Swan Creek to build a K-8 school. With help from Valencia Campbell, we helped raise local voices against deforestation through our fall newsletter. The forest fell, nonetheless. Much work remains to be done to prevent loss of our remaining fragments of forest.

General Membership Meetings and Educational Events

The Prince George's Sierra Club (virtual) Winter Social featured presentations about green infrastructure and climate-friendly yard care. While we had hoped and planned for an in-person fall meeting at Cosca Regional Park, concerns about the COVID pandemic resulted in changing the celebration to a virtual venue. The (virtual) Fall Celebration included presentation of the Maloney Environmental Service Award to Dr. Sacoby Wilson for his outstanding work for Environmental Justice. Dr. Wilson and Jan Michael Archer addressed the group about Environmental Justice issues in Prince George's County.

Other education events included a session about the legislative priorities for the 2021 General Assembly session, a webinar about how to use iNaturalist for the City Nature Challenge, and a workshop about how to provide public comments on the Climate Action Plan.



Communications

Our Communications team increased our social media presence by increasing use of Facebook, Instagram and twitter to publicize events and share information about issues and advocacy. Our online [issues forum](#) and [quarterly newsletters](#) gave PGSC members and other local environmental advocates a platform for raising up new voices and sharing information. We sent out 39 emails to members and supporters, averaging over 5000 recipients for each email; on average, about 550 recipients opened each email. ExCom member Joseph Jakuta created a Twitter account for the Prince George's Group in March of 2021. Also in March 2021, ExCom member James Lawson created an Instagram account for the group and ExCom member Joseph Jakuta undertook efforts to brand the account similarly to the Facebook page and Twitter account. These accounts largely share events and advocacy opportunities. Additionally, a regularly scheduled #FloraFaunaFriday with a picture of an animal or plant taken in Prince George's was started, though this on hiatus for the winter. Posts are coordinated between all three accounts and images for events and advocacy opportunities are made using Adobe Photoshop Mix for iOS and pictures made available by members of the Prince George's Group or creative commons licensed pictures.

Outdoors for all

While constrained due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the PGSC outings program hosted seven “virtual outings” using photos and video clips to share interesting findings from natural places near home. These sessions included “visits” to some of Prince George’s County’s Special Conservation Areas and a celebration of biodiversity using observations from the City Nature Challenge. Monthly in-person outings resumed in August, with half-day excursions to Watkins Regional Park, Parris Glendening Nature Preserve, Jug Bay Natural Area, and the Indian Head Rail Trail along Mattawoman Creek. We also hosted the Maryland Chapter’s Outings Leaders training session at Watkins Regional Park in December. Several new PGSC outings leader trainees are working toward certification as the year comes to a close. We look forward to a First Day hike at Greenbelt National Park with new leader, Lily Fountain, to open the New Year.



Book Discussions

We hosted eight virtual “Big Ideas” discussions centering around these books: *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* by Bill Gates, the *New Climate War* by Michael Mann, *Politics is for Power* by Eitan Hersh, *Nature’s Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy, *Finding the Mother Tree* by Suzanne Simard, *Under a White Sky* by Elizabeth Colbert, *Trace: Memory, History, Race, & the American Landscape* by Lauret Savoy, and *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope and Healing* by Katharine Hayhoe. Sharing perspectives on the books and related films and interviews was consistently engaging and inspiring.

Testimony and Comments

The Prince George’s County Sierra Club provided the following public testimony and comments in 2021:

[Baltimore-Washington Maglev – More Harm than Good](#)

[Bowie-Mitchellville Master Plan comments](#)

[Support for CB-076-2021 to amend the Tree Canopy Ordinance](#)

[Support for CB-016-2021 to restrict use of variance](#)

[Faithful execution of the County-wide Map Amendment](#)

[Opposition to use of Guilford Woods for housing development](#)

[Support CB613 to prohibit new coal and gas fired power plants in Prince George's County](#)

[Oppose HB615 Sunday Deer Hunting](#)

[Support HB970 – Stop the Maglev](#)

[To County Council re MD Environmental Rights Amendment](#)

[Oppose HB980 – Prince George's County Ethics definitions](#)

[Oppose HB991 Forest Mitigation Banks](#)

[Comments on M-NCPPC budget](#)

[Comments on Prince George's County budget](#)

[Comments on Prince George's County CIP budget](#)

[Letter to Alsobrooks on Grand Slam Plan](#)

[Support Expansion of RainCheck Rebate Program](#)

[Comments on Waste Section of Climate Action Plan](#)

[Support Hyattsville phase out of gas-powered leaf blowers](#)

[Support Climate Solutions Now](#)

[Support Climate Action Plan for PGCPD](#)

[Comments on DCDOT plan for bus depot and DMV DCL facility in Cheverly](#)

[Support for Prince George's County Climate Action Plan](#)

2021 LEADERSHIP TEAM

Executive Committee

Janet Gingold (elected 2019, Chair)

Anne Riley (elected 2019, Co-Vice Chair, Water liaison)

Barbara Sollner-Webb (elected 2020, Co-Vice Chair)

Lily Fountain (elected 2019, Representative to MD Chapter, Secretary)

Na'ilah Dawkins (elected 2020, Conservation Chair)

Joseph Jakuta (elected 2020, Climate Parents lead; social media lead)

David Brosch (elected 2020)

James Lawson (appointed 1/3)

Treasurer: Nancy Hammond

Webmaster: John Straub

Communications: Janis Oppelt, Janet Gingold, Joseph Jakuta

Transportation: Nick Orrick, Janet Gingold

Zero Waste Team: Martha Ainsworth, Judy Allen-Lowenthal, Dave Brosch, Na'ilah Dawkins, Dawn DeLong, Sebastian Fernandez, Maureen Fine, Ben Fischler, Todd Larson, Janis Oppelt, Lore Rosenthal, Clarissa Salcedo, Barbara Sollner-Webb, Abby Snyder, Terry Stakem, Bill Walmsley.

Climate Action Committee: Janet Gingold, Lily Fountain, Cheryl Rollins, Jamal Rollins, Pat Jackman, Maureen Fine, Lore Rosenthal, James Lawson, Sydney Jacobs, Joseph Jakuta, David Brosch, Treda Grayson, Ben Fischler

Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Membership Action Committee: Lily Fountain, Na'ilah Dawkins