

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • JAN / FEB / MARCH 2022



2021 VOLUNTEER AWARD WINNERS

INSIDE: GEORGIA POWER TO SHUT DOWN 80% ITS COAL FLEET • GET INVOLVED AT THE LEGISLATURE
ADVOCATE FOR CLEAN ENERGY DURING THE IRP • SAVE OUR SWAMP • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS AND MORE!

All things, big and small

BY PHYLLIS RICHARDSON, CHAIR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

All large things are an accumulation or the result of growth of smaller things. Every large fire begins with a spark, just as every oak begins with an acorn. However, conditions have to be favorable to allow for the growth of the flame and sprouting of the oak. That is where we come in.

We are the fuel that builds the flame of transformational efforts



PHYLLIS RICHARDSON

on climate change. We are the planters of the acorn that grows into the proverbial oak which will provide shade for

future generations and stand firm against the winds of environmental injustice.

My interest in the environment and climate justice began at a young age. My life was shaped by an environmental incident. My father, a Vietnam veteran, was assigned to clean up radioactive waste in Enewetak located in the Marshall Islands. He wasn't aware of the type of materials he was handling during his time there, but the effects of that experience had a serious impact on his mental and physical health. It also impacted our family in several different ways.

The only positive we are able to draw from that experience is we were able to identify the incident that negatively impacted our lives. Many families do not have that benefit. Many negative environmental impacts go unidentified and

unaddressed because those impacted aren't aware of the source of their issues. One of the main strategies used to thwart climate and environmental justice is making sure the public is not educated to environmental threats. Corporations and governments go out of their way to impede environmental education.

Earth is so precious, yet we continue to abuse and neglect it. The ocean produces over half of the world's oxygen and absorbs 50 times more carbon dioxide than our atmosphere, but we continue to fill it with trash and plastics. How will we be able to grow food for generations to come if we continue to destroy the soil with chemicals, coal ash, nuclear waste, and much more. We take the earth for granted.

We must also protect and expand our forests. Forests are not only one of the most beautiful and biologically important environmental features, they provide habitat to countless animal species and human settlements. Forests also provide watershed protection, prevent soil erosion, and mitigate climate change. Despite our dependence on forests, we continue to drive them to extinction.

Our approach to addressing environmental issues as a society directly correlates to our interaction with each other. How we treat our environment is a direct reflection on how we treat each other. It is the foundation of social justice and equity. None of this is a revelation to anyone who has worked on climate change and environmental justice for even a "New York Minute".

The absence of environmental consciousness and climate awareness breeds greed that injures current populations and robs future generations of their health even before they're born. This greed leads

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On the Cover

A collage of winners of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's 2021 Volunteer Awards. Clockwise from top right: Tania Robinson, Pete Johnson, Gwinnett Group volunteers, Mary Lou Dabbs, Roger Buerki, and Bill Jackson.

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to decisions that could profit only a few thousand dollars today, but cost millions of dollars and, most tragically, the loss of life in the future. We have seen innumerable examples of building products or manufacturing processes that have caused serious harm to human health and the environment. These tragedies could have been avoided by simply asking the question, "What is the impact on the environment?"

A lot of effort is put into suppressing that question from the minds of Americans. Instant gratification outweighs protection of the environment. However, we, along with every other environmentally conscious group and person in the world, must stand as the vanguard to protect our world from our own destruction.

In our role as builders of the flame, we must inspire and invest in anyone who could have an inclination to activism. We must show them that they have an army of support and there are many people who share their beliefs.

As the planters, we must find the best soil to plant the acorns of awareness that will grow into solutions to reverse harm to the environment. We must provide nutrients of information so that those ideas can grow into mighty oaks of knowledge. Our greatest opportunity remains the education of young people on their role in creating environmental change and how it will improve their lives.

I am inspired with optimism that we are looking forward to a period of strong growth in climate activism and environmental justice. The Sierra Club must remain at the forefront of these efforts and one of the vanguards to protect our planet and the human race. I look forward to marching with you all arm-in-arm as we move closer to a brighter and healthier day.

At the end of 2021, Phyllis Richardson was elected to serve as chair of the the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter.



CHAPTER NEWS

COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter has begun holding local outdoor outings again, following new protocols to protect outings participants from COVID-19 (see page 9 for more information). The Chapter office in Decatur remains closed, Chapter staff continue to work from home, and most meetings and events are still being held virtually.

For the latest on our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and links to many available community resources, visit sierraclub.org/georgia/coronavirus-updates. And be sure to check our calendar at sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar for all our upcoming virtual events.

NEW EXCOM MEMBERS & NEW CHAPTER LEADERS

Congratulations to the members of our Executive Committee (ExCom) elected in November: William Bryan, Phyllis Richardson, Doug Williams, and Amanda Woomer. Phyllis was reelected for

another term, while William, Doug, and Amanda are all newcomers to the ExCom. Thanks to all four for agreeing to volunteer on ExCom, which is the primary governing body for the Georgia Chapter.

The Georgia Chapter also extends a sincere thank you to outgoing ExCom members Daniel Blackman, Berneta Haynes, and Tejas Kotak for their years of service as leaders in the Chapter.

New officers have also been selected to lead our ExCom. Phyllis Richardson is our new ExCom Chair, Jumana Master will remain Vice Chair for Administration, and Amanda Woomer is our new Vice Chair for Conservation.

Congrats again to all our new leaders!

WELCOME ALIYA!

We're excited to welcome our new State Policy Intern, Aliya Elmore, to the Georgia Chapter! Aliya is in her third year at the University of



DOUG WILLIAMS



WILLIAM BRYAN



AMANDA WOOMER



ALIYA ELMORE

Georgia double majoring in political science and sociology and grew up in McDonough. As our State Policy Intern, Aliyah will be helping us in our legislative work this year.

Although her primary legislative focus was previously economic and educational equality, her priorities have shifted to advocating for environmental justice and developing an intersectional approach to environmental advocacy. Welcome to the team, Aliya!

Congrats to our Volunteer Award winners!

BY SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER STAFF

Congratulations to the recipients of our 2021 Volunteer Awards!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's annual Volunteer Awards recognize the folks who have made exceptional contributions to our work across the state. With these awards, we hope to highlight the work of lots of different kinds of leaders in our community of volunteers – whether or not they'd identify themselves as such!

Volunteers were nominated by their colleagues in November and early December. The nominations were reviewed by a committee consisting of five Chapter volunteers and two staff.

OGDEN DOREMUS AWARD FOR CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP

*In honor of the influential forerunner of the Georgia Chapter, the Ogden Doremus Conservation Leadership Award honors exceptional contributions to the protection, preservation, and restoration of Georgia's natural environments and the ecological communities that inhabit them. This year's awardee is **Roger Buerki**, Georgia Chapter & Centennial Group conservation & outings volunteer. Roger is a trailblazer in Georgia's conservation community. He's one of the original "River Rats," local activists who worked to protect the Chattahoochee from development and campaigned for national legislation to create the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area in the 1970s. He's praised for his "hands-on" approach, people skills, and "walking the walk." He's frequently spotted walking some of Cobb's busier streets*



ROGER BUERKI

picking up litter. Several testimonials said Roger inspired them to get involved in the conservation movement. His generosity with his time extends beyond the Sierra Club – he also volunteers with the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, Keep Cobb Beautiful, Chattahoochee Nature Center, and more.

OUTSTANDING GROUP AWARD

The Outstanding Group Award recognizes one of our Local Groups for their recent efforts in their community.



GWINNETT GROUP VOLUNTEERS

The **Greater Gwinnett Group**, which serves Gwinnett and surrounding areas, is this year's recipient of the Outstanding Group Award. Volunteers with the Gwinnett Group have worked hard to build relationships with both

local government bodies and other environmental organizations. In 2021, the group conducted more than 50 cleanup events in partnership with Come Clean Gwinnett and Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful, held voter registration events in diverse communities, and worked to ensure accessibility and proper maintenance of the Beaver Run Wetlands. Special recognition goes to outgoing Gwinnett Group Chair Dan Friedman, who stepped down last year after 10 years leading the group. Testimonials praised Dan for going "above and beyond" and for reinvigorating the Gwinnett Group, turning it into one of the most active groups in Georgia.

OUTSTANDING GROUP LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Outstanding Group Leadership award recognizes local champions and leaders who tirelessly push to ensure productive, healthy, and just groups across the state.



MARY LOU DABBS

This year, we are recognizing LaGrange Group Chair **Mary Lou Dabbs**. Nominations for Mary Lou called her cheerful, organized, and extremely capable. Despite a pandemic that prevented most in-person activities, Mary Lou is credited with using her technological savvy to improve communications with

group members using social media, Zoom meetings, and email. Mary Lou has been so successful leading the LaGrange Group that they are considering expanding their boundaries to bring in more people!

CHUCK MCGRADY AWARD FOR POLITICAL ACUMEN

We're honored to continue McGrady's legacy by highlighting volunteers who invest deeply in our political and legislative initiatives, who ensure all have what they need to engage in our democracy, who fight for more just policies in the state, and who hold our representatives accountable.



TANIA ROBINSON

This year's awardee is incoming Centennial Group ExCom member and current Chapter political volunteer, **Tania Robinson**. Tania is being recognized for her dedication in the Chapter's legislative and political programs, for her services as a member of the hiring committee for temporary political and legislative staffers, and for being an exemplary representative of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter. She is passionate about the work and eager to play a role in shaping our efforts for the future. Folks from the selections committee noted Tania's ability to weave in empathy and care into volunteering, as well as her dependability in the spaces she dedicates herself

to. Tania's expansive volunteering goes beyond the Sierra Club – she's also active in local politics and her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta.

STELLA MARIE SCHMITTNER AWARD FOR BEHIND THE SCENES IMPACT

In honor and memory of the impact Stella Marie Schmittner had on the Chapter's fiscal health at a crucial time in our organizational growth, this award recognizes a volunteer who might be less visible to most, but who makes a quiet and significant difference in the successes of our groups and Chapter.



BILL JACKSON

Bill Jackson, Savannah River Group Membership Services Chair, is this year's recipient for improving communications for the group at a time when it became more important than ever to organize online. Attentive to details and dedicated to accuracy, Bill grew the group's social media presence (including developing the group's social media policy) and maintained its email list to keep the group's members informed. He's also praised for his efforts to teach others how to use digital tools in order to accomplish tasks on their own.

OUTINGS LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Chapter's outings program works with communities across Georgia to

make sure everyone has opportunities to experience and learn about the outdoors. Outings help build the foundation for our commitment to enjoy, explore, and protect, and this award recognizes outstanding leadership within the program.



PETE JOHNSON

If you've ever floated down a river in Georgia, chances are you've paddled past **Pete Johnson**. His knowledge and experience as an Outings Leader and advocate has inspired many veterans to take part in the Sierra Club Military Outdoors program over the years. He was instrumental in helping with "virtual outings" during the pandemic, and as soon as it was safe to hold outings again, Pete was leading a group down the Chattahoochee. He played an important role in starting the Vets for Essential Workers Campaign that launched in February 2021, which seeks to give veterans and their families an opportunity to give back to the folks who kept our communities working during this pandemic. We're honored to give Pete Johnson the 2021 Outings Leadership Award.

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The Georgia Chapter runs on volunteers, and we would not be successful without the time these generous individuals dedicate to our shared cause. We cannot thank you enough for what you do!

Southern Company to shut down 80% of its coal plants by 2028

BY SIERRA CLUB BEYOND COAL TEAM

After years of pressure from grassroots organizations, clean energy advocates, and concerned community members, Southern Company has finally decided to take a step in the right direction and close down some of the dirtiest power plants in its fleet.

Southern Company, which is the nation's third largest utility, has announced plans to close most of its coal burning units at Plant Scherer in Juliette near Macon, Plant Bowen near Cartersville, and Plant Wansley near Carrollton, in addition to its coal units at Plant Gaston and Plant Barry in Alabama. The utility announced during its quarterly earnings report in December that the closures will occur by 2028.

This announcement represents a big victory for the Beyond Coal Campaign, but if we are to truly embrace environmental justice, the closure announcement is just the beginning. Southern Company must prioritize supporting coal plant communities during this transition, including plant workers. We need to make sure communities are given the resources to thrive through this transition, rather than be left behind.

Additionally, legacy pollution from these coal plants, like coal ash, must be cleaned up properly to protect

COAL ASH UPDATES

The public comment period for the Plant Bowen coal ash permit wrapped in November, and we are happy to report that thanks to the help of Georgia Sierrans and supporters we submitted 650 comments to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

The EPD has released an updated permit schedule for the remaining coal ash permits it will be considering, slotting the coal ash permits for Plant McDonough and Plant Scherer for March-May 2022. Be sure to sign up for updates at GeorgiaCoalAsh.org to make your voice heard to protect our water and health!

the health of communities nearby.

There is still work to be done. Southern Company plans to keep operating a number of coal units, including Plant Miller north of Birmingham, Alabama — the biggest carbon polluter in the country. Southern Company made a commitment to reach “net zero” carbon emissions by 2050, which means it's our job to hold the utility to its promise.

CLIMATE ACTION CAMPAIGN

The fight for national action on the climate crisis continues!

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

The fight for the Build Back Better Act continues! The almost \$2 trillion dollar federal package, whittled down from the previous \$3.5 trillion figure, includes investments in climate, energy, and social services. As it stands, the legislation calls for over \$500 billion for climate, the biggest climate investment we've ever seen by ten-fold. The legislation now needs

to pass the Senate floor, take into account any modifications, and be signed by President Biden to be passed into law.

Georgia's U.S. Senators, Jon Ossoff and Reverend Raphael Warnock, have been climate champions since being elected in the January 2021 runoff. We've had several virtual lobby visits with grassroots partners and volunteers alike. Out of one of our virtual fly-ins with Senator Ossoff's staff, volunteer and activist Dr. Preeti

Jaggi authored an op-ed calling on Ossoff to protect our children's future (read the op-ed at bit.ly/Jaggi-OpEd)

We also teamed up with Georgia Interfaith Power and Light to deliver a petition to in-district offices of Sen. Ossoff and Sen. Warnock with over 10,000 signatures from Georgia constituents urging our federally elected leaders to pass the Build Back Better Act.

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Additionally, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter partnered with Moms Clean Air Force, Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, and Georgia Conservation Voters to host an event targeted at constituents in west Atlanta. The afternoon consisted of petition signing, crafting notes to targeted decision

makers, and kombucha. One of Rep. Nikema Williams' staffers even made an appearance!

We are hopeful that the Build Back Better Act budget reconciliation legislation passes, but leadership needs to hear from you to continue fighting the good fight! In 2022, we

are continuing our work with the Climate Action Campaign and will be pivoting to the EPA as a priority.

Questions? Want to plug into this work? Contact Georgia Chapter Conservation Organizer Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org.

CLEAN ENERGY COMMITTEE

Help us advocate for clean energy during the 2022 IRP!



Photo credit: Ricky Leroux

Protesters rally outside the Georgia Public Service Commission office during the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) process in 2019. The 2022 IRP process is set to begin in January.

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

It's the most wonderful time of every three years: time for Integrated Resource Planning (and a new rate case)! This is our moment to advocate for expansion of clean energy, energy efficiency, and residential solar incentivization. In the same vein, we will push for the transition away from dirty fossil fuels and proper clean up of coal ash. Want to know more about the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) and Rate Case process? Read our blog post all about it at bit.ly/IRP-Explainer.

This is a fantastic opportunity to get involved with our Chapter and with energy planning on a state-wide scale. We are looking for volunteers to join in our meetings, organizing with us for mass action to engage with the Public Service Commissioners on our goals of a just transition to 100% clean energy. Check out the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter calendar to keep

up to date on when we will be hosting meetings for the Clean Energy Committee.

Sign up here: bit.ly/GAIRP-22.

Clean energy organizing is still relevant at the local scale, too. Volunteers in Decatur are continuing their work, beginning two years ago, to get their own city to commit to 100% clean energy. Right now, the City of Decatur is conducting a clean energy survey to ask residents and visitors to the city on their opinions of clean energy, and you can take the survey here: survey.alchemer.com/s3/6585655/Clean-Energy-Decatur.

Among other localities in Georgia committed to 100% clean energy, Augusta-Richmond County is pursuing a Green Augusta initiative to begin a transition to zero emissions vehicles. Athens-Clarke County and Savannah are both continuing work to finalize their clean energy

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action plans. In pursuit of a 100% commitment, the Ready for 100 Gwinnett initiative is working to establish a working relationship with the newly formed Gwinnett County Sustainability Commission and to advocate for the county to establish a Sustainability Office.

Additionally, we continue to monitor Georgia Power’s on-bill tariff pilot, titled RISE (Residential Investment for Saving Energy). It targets 250 homes in high energy burden areas in both Atlanta and Athens to provide energy efficiency improvements for low-income families.

The program outcomes thus far, like a number of Georgia Power’s efficiency programs, is underperforming due to COVID restrictions. Georgia Power is modifying the RISE program to try to increase eligibility for the RISE efficiency benefits, by expanding the number of zip codes eligible, allowing savings for both electric and methane gas in calculating the benefit, and improving their marketing. In 2022, there will be opportunities to advocate for increased resources in the IRP process to expand efficiency efforts for homes, apartments, and businesses.

EQUITY COMMITTEE

Who we are: The Georgia Chapter Equity Committee

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER & TIA FAY, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR AND ADMIN ASSISTANT, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

We’re the Equity Committee! We know there’s a lot of work to be done to better align the Chapter’s values and actions, and we’re digging in. We envision a Chapter in which a lens of equity and justice is incorporated throughout all of the Chapter’s work. We’ll continue creating spaces for leaders to learn, building robust community relationships, and showing up for

frontline partners until we work ourselves out of a job.

In the past year, we’ve been meeting regularly to move forward the Chapter’s equity, inclusion, and justice goals and reorganizing ourselves to be better positioned in 2022. For example, we’re supporting the annual planning processes of committees and campaigns across the state to ensure equitable processes and equitable outcomes are thoughtfully embedded from the beginning. We’re continuing to support the Stone Mountain Action Coalition, which is dedicated to a more inclusive Stone Mountain Park. And we’re equipping our leadership with tools and opportunities to invest in continual learning about what it means to fight for racial justice in their lives and in their leadership roles.

We’re thrilled to announce that as a result of some dedicated growth and community-building work, we’re stronger as a result. Meet our newly expanded crew!

EQUITY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:



NINA DUTTON
(she/her)



JILLIAN ELLER
(they/them)



TIA FAY



SUZANNE HAERTHER
(she/her)



BETTYE HARRIS
(she/her)



TEJAS KOTAK
(he/him)



JUMANA MASTER
(she/her)



JESSICA MOREHEAD
(she/her)



PHYLLIS RICHARDSON
(she/her)



WAN SMITH
(she/her)

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The GA Legislative Session is here. Sign up to get involved!

BY MARK WOODALL, CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

The new year has arrived, and so has the Georgia Legislature's 2022 Legislative Session. Engaging with your lawmakers at the state level is one of the best ways for folks to get involved in advancing climate action! Does the thought of having a phone call with your state lawmaker fill you with dread? Do you want to help pass laws that will address the threat of climate change but don't know where to start? We're here to help!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Legislative Liaisons program is designed to make it easier for volunteers to make connections with their state lawmakers. History has convincingly shown that repeated conversations and relationship building with legislators can result in major improvements in legislators' voting records on protecting the environment, and, in many cases, even develop new leaders for our efforts in Georgia.

We understand talking with your lawmaker for the first (or the fifth!) time can be daunting, so let us help set you up for a successful conversation! We'll give you information and fact sheets to help you stay informed, offer trainings to gain new or sharpen existing lobbying skills, and give you anything else you need to

confidently meet with your elected representatives. You'll also connect with your fellow liaisons to celebrate wins, learn from losses, and most importantly, grow together as a community.

If you decide to become a Legislative Liaison, the Georgia Chapter is committed to giving you enough support to make this a rewarding experience for you (We hope one of your best experiences ever!). We have great opportunities in the next several years to move the environmental agenda forward in Georgia. With your help, 2022 will be a year in which we see victories on all the issues we care about — pure air and water, environmental justice, clean energy, protecting our beautiful lands, and so much more!

Sign up for our Legislative Liaisons program at this link: tinyurl.com/2022-Liaisons.

ANOTHER WAY TO ENGAGE

If you're looking for other ways to engage during the Legislative Session, we have you covered.

Go to bit.ly/SCGA-Legislative and join our Legislative Team. Sign up on that page and we'll let you know when key bills are coming up for a vote, tell you about virtual events and trainings, and help you contact your lawmakers when the bills are on the move.

OUTINGS

Our Sierra Club Outings are back!

BY LEE GRAHAM, INTERIM OUTINGS CHAIR

Since Sierra Club Outings reopened after the COVID lockdown, Sierra Club Georgia Chapter groups have led 16 outings.

To learn of Sierra outings as they are announced, go to sierraclub.org/georgia/outings and click on "Sign Up for Outings Email List."

In 2022, we will be leading hiking



Hikers take on Panola Mountain during a recent Sierra Club outing led by Max Brown.

and biking events as well as outings based around birding, environmental-issue sites, photography, and backpacking.

Want to learn to help lead kids on outdoors adventures? See the Georgia Sierra Club I.C.O. outings

site at sierraclub.org/georgia/atlanta-ico.

If you are a veteran or want to lead outdoor trips for the Military/Veteran community, please also contact Lornett Vestal, Military

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Outdoors Senior Campaign Representative, at lornett.vestal@sierraclub.org.

Outings are presented by volunteer leaders, and we welcome ideas for outings locations. If you enjoy getting outdoors and would like to help guide others

on outings, you can take Outing Leaders Training to learn how to lead and assist with Sierra Club Outings.

We expect to have an Outing Leader Training class in the next few months. Email Lee Graham at leegrah3@gmail.com if interested.

WINTER HIKE!

Celebrate the new year and join your fellow Sierrans for a hike through Sweetwater Creek Park at 1 PM on February 5. RSVP at bit.ly/SC-WinterHike.

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

Some Atlanta victories and a hard road ahead in 2022

BY EDDIE EHLERT, CHAIR, POLITICAL COMMITTEE

The Sierra Club participated in more Atlanta municipal races this year than in the last dozen years, and many of our endorsed candidates were victorious! We have new Atlanta City Council Members Keisha Waites, Jason Dozier, Liliana Bakhtiari, and Alex Wan, who all believe in and support the work of the Sierra Club.

This bodes well for energy, water, and transportation issues in the City of Atlanta, as well as a more equitable and accessible city. This comes at a time when much of the efforts toward greater sustainability and citizen-friendly energy policies had begun to languish. Now it's up to citizens in Atlanta to pay attention to the work of the Council and help keep environmental progress in the councilmembers minds!

Now for the hard part. The 2022 election will be a hard slog for everyone seeking environmental successes in Georgia. Legislative elections are an opportunity for all Sierrans to remind State Senate, State House and Statewide Office candidates that we all want an Okefenokee free from mines. We need to keep focus on expanding renewable energy with a renewed focus on expansion of rooftop solar to everyone who wants it. We must get the attention of legislators that know we deserve better transportation options than perpetual traffic jams. Maybe along the way we can get legislators to finally take our collective health seriously!

We have to pay attention. We have a General Assembly more interested in loosening gun laws and tightening voting restrictions than improving access to clean energy and addressing coastal flooding due to sea level rise. It makes you shake your head.

BUT IT IS UP TO US! Many lawmakers and other elected officials will be facing their first credible opponents in years. Even in the age of Zoom, we all have an opportunity to help get better leaders elected. The Political Committee will begin our biannual job of vetting candidates very soon, and I hope this year yields a crop of dedicated citizen legislators to rival 2020. They will be there, putting themselves on the line, and they will need our help.

So watch for our endorsements and seek out the candidates in whatever forums the virus allows this year. Be ready to help candidates with time or money (or both). I know most folks hate politics but this year it is really serious. We are running out of time and running out of chances. It will definitely be a year where every voice will need to be heard!



Georgia Clinicians for Climate Action

Georgia Clinicians for Climate Action is a statewide nonpartisan coalition of current, future, and retired health professionals whose mission is to educate and mobilize colleagues, communities, policy-makers, and the public in support of climate solutions which improve health for all Georgia citizens.

To learn more about GCCA, become a member, receive our newsletter and how we might help with a climate solution in your area, please email: GCCAinfo@gacca.org.

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Master plans, federal money, and bus network redesigns

BY TEJAS KOTAK, CHAIR, TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Over the past several months, the state of Georgia has seen a lot of good transit and transportation plans and policies move forward, and the Georgia Chapter has maintained our involvement in pushing these to be even better.

Henry, Newton, and Forsyth Counties have been working on Transit Master Plans, and we have advocated for creating regional connections, reasonable fares, and reliable and frequent service. Cities across Fulton County had a T-SPLOST vote last November to consider funding transportation projects with sales tax money, and we pushed them to include the most sustainable options for their projects lists. While we are disappointed that transit projects were not included, we are heartened that multi-use trails, sidewalk expansion, and road repairs make up a large majority of the projects, and that road expansion is only a small portion of the list. Stay involved with your local governments to see what kinds of projects are planned in your backyard.

We have worked with MARTA on promoting their Bus Network Redesign (marta2040nextgenbus.com), which will reorganize where their buses go, how often they show up, and who they serve. We have advocated for increasing bus frequencies to shorten wait times at bus stops, improve reliability, and increase ridership. This will leave gaps in the network as current bus routes are removed from low-ridership areas to reallocate those drivers and vehicles, so we

are also advocating for new on-demand service to serve those riders who rely on transit. Surveys are available for anyone interested in commenting on this project — especially current riders who will be affected by its results.

The massive \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will guarantee Georgia \$9.2 billion for roads and bridges and \$1.4 billion for public transit over the next five years. There are billions more in competitive grant programs for resiliency, safer streets, additional transit money, and bridge repair programs that the state, counties, or cities could apply for. All this new money has the potential to transform our state to be more climate-focused, but only if it is spent correctly. For that to happen, we need political leaders who understand the needs of our various communities and the planet at large. Remember to check your voter registration, look for inspiring candidates to support, and get out the vote when election season kicks up again.

LEADERSHIP POSITION OPEN

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 Tejas Kotak at tkotak013@gmail.com if you are interested in this role.

WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

Saving our Swamp

BY TRICIA EMBRY & JOSH HOGAN, CO-CHAIRS, WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE & LARRY WINSLETT, WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE VOLUNTEER

In November, the Wildlands and Wildlife Committee dedicated its monthly meeting to the Okefenokee Swamp and the threat it faces today from a proposed mine. The meeting featured a virtual screening of the short film produced by the Okefenokee Protection Alliance, "Sacred Waters: The Okefenokee in Peril." The film's breathtaking footage and compelling narrative captivated long-standing committee members and guests alike, and we were treated to an

unexpected chance to discuss it with the filmmaker, Mark Albertin, who joined us for the meeting.

Members active in the Committee's Okefenokee Issue Team rounded out the meeting with an update on how the fight against a mining permit for Twin Pines is progressing and ways to get involved. We also introduced a new photography contest sponsored by the Georgia Nature Photographers Association and the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter in order to raise public awareness of the beauty of the Okefenokee and its ecological importance as a unique resource.

This juried contest features four categories: Landscape, Animals, Plants, and People in Nature. There are two submission periods.

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Photo credit: Tricia Embry

A canoe sits docked at a raised camping platform in the wetlands of the Okefenokee Swamp.

1. Spring contest 2022: submissions accepted in May, winners announced early July
2. Fall contest 2022: submissions accepted in November, winners announced mid-January 2023

The contest is open to the public, and the cost is \$5 per entry with no limit on the number of entries. Prizes will be awarded for each category for first, second, and third as well as some special awards. For more information, visit gnpa.org/2021/11/14/the-year-of-the-okefenokee or contact Larry Winslett at winfog@windstream.net.

In early November, Wildlands Co-Chair Tricia Embry went on a personal trip to the swamp with three other adventurers, canoeing 12 miles from Kingfisher Landing to the Maul Hammock camping platform along the water trail that would be most impacted by a proposed titanium mine just a few hundred feet away.

Tricia said, "No one who experiences this magical place will ever doubt the value of it. I encourage everyone who can join one of the Chapter's Okefenokee outings in 2022 to go for it!"

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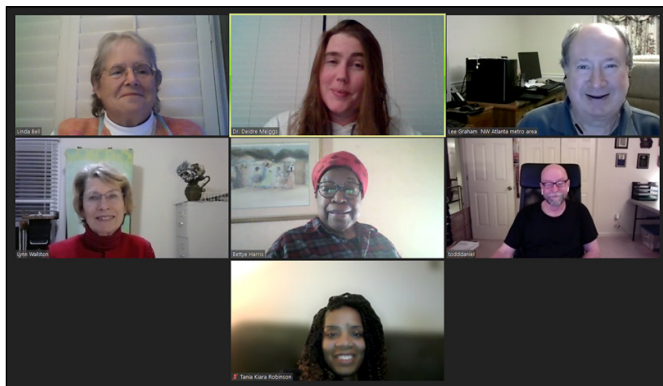
WINTER/SPRING 2022 GROUP NEWS

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

HAPPY NEW YEAR, Y'ALL ... FROM YOUR 2022 CENTENNIAL GROUP LEADERSHIP TEAM!



Our Executive Committee members are Linda Bell, Dr. Deidre Meiggs, Lynn Walston, Todd Daniel, and newly elected Tania Robinson (welcome aboard!). Lee Graham is Outings Chair & Newsletter Editor; Bettye Harris is Chapter Delegate. We send special appreciation to outgoing ExCom member Jenny Bartee (thanks for all you do!).

We are proud of the support from Centennial Group



Centennial Group members pose near a birdhouse on the Riverline Trail, a group project (left), and on Blood Mountain (right) after an outing.

volunteers & friends during the challenges of 2020 and 2021. Thanks for staying active and involved (as you were able); for leading or participating in hikes during our recent ramp-up of fall & winter outings (e.g., Blood Mountain, Cloudland Canyon, Sweetwater Creek, Pinhoti Cave Creek, Kennesaw Mountain, Sope Creek, CRNRA/West Palisades, west Beltline bike trip, Red Top Mountain). Check our Outings Calendar for upcoming events at sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar.

Thanks also for attending our virtual meetings and our fabulous in-person October 7th picnic. Other memorable speakers/topics/events of 2021: Tabling at 'Juneteenth Festival' (sponsored by Cobb NAACP); partnering with Keep Cobb Beautiful, Rivers Alive, and Life University for water testing and litter cleanup; hosting Zoom forums about equity, community health, transit, clean air, wildlife, and treasured landmarks.

Please join us, invite others, or ask us about: outings or outing leader training and about 2022 projects & committees including conservation; legislative/political; membership/outreach; transit; equity. Please contact: lynnwalston22@yahoo.com (group chair); or leeagrah3@gmail.com (outings; newsletter). Wishing you a safe and prosperous new year.

GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial

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MeetUp: meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club



GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

BY DAN FRIEDMAN, OUTGOING CHAIR,
GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

Happy New Year! As we move out of 2021 and into 2022, we can look back on many accomplishments and forward to many opportunities. 2021 saw the Beaver Ruin Wetlands take a large step forward to becoming a park that all of Gwinnett's citizens can enjoy. While the park will not be ready for visitors until early 2023, the vision that is becoming realized has been worked on for almost a decade. We participated in more than 100 cleanups this year across all parts of the county. We are working with county commissioners to develop more efficient modes of public transportation. Our energy initiatives include working with county and municipal leaders to move to cleaner sources of energy and away from fossil fuels.

Looking forward to 2022, we will continue our 2021 initiatives to include additional cleanups, stream monitorings, more discussions with elected officials on clean, safe energy and public transportation. Additionally, 2022 is an election year with state government and one U.S. Senate seat to be decided. As more information about the 2020 election comes to light, we are seeing how close our democracy came to being overthrown. As members in a democratic society, we have a solemn obligation to move our country back from the brink by electing candidates who hold

dear the principals of democracy. We will be working to elect candidates who uphold the principles of a democratic society and who believe climate change is real and every Georgian should have clean air and water.

Our January meeting featured Gina Weber, Deputy Director of the Georgia Sierra Club, who discussed our accomplishments in 2021 and what we will be doing in 2022. In February, Mark Woodall will discuss the Georgia Legislature, the environmental bills moving through the Legislature, and what the political outlook for Georgia will be.

Lastly, with the new year, the Greater Gwinnett Group will have new leadership. As your new Co-Chairs, Michael Hallen and Curt Thompson will lead the Group. After having the honor of leading the Group for 10 years, I have decided to step down and take a sabbatical. I am confident that Michael and Curt, along with Scott Presson, Sharon Yun, and Jorge Granados, will move the Greater Gwinnett Group to increased involvement to better the everyday lives of Gwinnett citizens and Georgians across the state.

GROUP INFORMATION

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Facebook: [facebook.com/
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 Leadership Team is delighted to welcome two new members to our Executive Committee: Dr. Mardi Schaufler and Dr. Troy Keller.

Mardi has served the LaGrange community many years as an OB/GYN delivering many, many healthy babies and caring for the health of a large number of community members of all ages. She has enthusiastically attended several of our local organic farm outings, as well as other outings, and



MARDI SCHAUFLER

spoken at a climate change rally in LaGrange on the affect climate change has on people's health.

Troy is a professor of environmental science at Columbus State University. He has been active in Sierra Club activities by joining Chapter phone-banking and text-banking teams. He also has encouraged his students to join West Point Lake Clean Ups and other environmental service projects.



TROY KELLER

We welcome back our returning ExCom Members: Mary Lou Dabbs (Chair), Ken Fiske, Joanna Baxter, Collie Graddick, and Brian Hunter. Other Leadership

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Team members include Sam Breyfogle (Conservation Chair), Ellen Parkhurst (Membership/Hospitality Chair), Travis Towns (Program Chair), Judy Lawrence (Treasurer), Paula Darden (Secretary), Joanne Vandewater (Tabling Chair), and Laura Breyfogle (Outings Chair).

After completing two seasons of monitoring our 25 bluebird boxes (on three “trails”), our monitors are created a slideshow presentation for our January meeting. If your group is interested in our sharing it with you, please contact Travis Towns at fttravist@aol.com.

After completing two successful years of planting and tending our pollinator garden, we have purchased a beautiful educational sign to adorn it and hopefully spark others to start their own pollinator gardens.

We had our first tabling opportunity (since COVID-19 changed all normal activities) in November at Troup County AG Day. Thanks to volunteers Ellen Parkhurst, Charlene Baxter, and Joanne Vandewater for inviting some folks to join us in the future.

Our monthly outings have resumed! All will be posted to our Facebook page (see link below), sent to the Chapter outings distribution list, and posted on the Chapter calendar. Limits are set for each and are especially important during continuing COVID precautions. Pre-registration is required. We welcome you to join us!

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GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/lagrange
Facebook: facebook.com/groups/300840033370271

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METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

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. A playlist of video recordings of MAG-hosted meetings is now available online at bit.ly/MAG-Playlist. (Time-saving tip: try skipping ahead to featured speakers' presentations and/or listen to the videos at 1.25x speed.)

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!

Our October meeting date fell during the early voting period for the 2021 municipal elections, so we invited MAG members and volunteers to a letter-writing party! We wrote letters to Atlanta residents to supply them with election information and shared our stories about why local elections matter to us.

For our November meeting, we learned from Dr. Eric Gilbert — an environmental microbiologist at Georgia State University — about the science, economics, and politics of plastic waste, including many of the ways in which it has become such a massive problem. We also discussed options and possibilities for dealing with plastic waste. The more constructive approaches to

the problems of plastic waste tend to involve reducing overall plastic use where unnecessary and reducing use of virgin (i.e., newly made from petroleum) plastic resins, such as through penalties to manufacturers for using virgin resins over reclaimed material.

Unfortunately, shorter-sighted approaches are looming nearby, promising a fix for the plastic waste problem but more likely merely reshaping it.

In Macon, a company called Brightmark is proposing to develop the largest plastic-to-fuel facility in the world at a cost of \$680 million dollars. This plant would turn plastics into diesel fuel and other harmful petrochemical products. Brightmark is pitching this plant as a solution to plastic pollution, but in reality, we expect that this plant will only increase our reliance on fossil fuels and result in negative environmental and health impacts in the Macon area. The Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority recently held a hearing in which more than 20 residents spoke in opposition to half a billion dollars in bonds to fund construction of the plant. We must keep the pressure on in opposition to this toxic plant.

Do you have friends in Macon? You can send them this link (bit.ly/Brightmark-Letter) if you think they would like to sign on to a letter to Macon-Bibb County officials opposing this facility and receive alerts for upcoming ways to take action.

At our December meeting, we heard from Georgia Conservation Voters (gcvoters.org) Executive Director Brionté McCorkle about GCV's campaigns

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for clean energy and democracy for all, including education and empowerment of member-owners of energy management cooperatives (such as Cobb EMC).

In 2022, we're starting out the year by joining up with other local Sierra Club groups for multi-group meetings in January and February. To keep up with these and other happenings, please check out the Chapter calendar (sierraclub.org/georgia/calendar) and our group's webpage and Facebook page (see links below).

BE HEARD: SEND YOUR INPUT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND MARTA

MARTA Bus Network Redesign: MARTA is seeking input on a bus network redesign through public meetings and a survey. Per a news release, MARTA will "solicit feedback on imagined scenarios that will ultimately inform a redesign of its bus network. MARTA riders and potential customers will be asked if they prefer to have buses arrive more frequently on fewer routes or serve more routes with less frequent arrivals." While this is not the choice we should have to be facing, in the meantime you can find out more and send in your feedback at MARTA2040NextGenBus.com.

Decatur energy survey: The City of Decatur is planning a transition to cleaner, renewable energy by 2030 and needs your input! If you live in, work in, or visit Decatur, this survey is open to you. Results will be reviewed before the end of the year. Fill out the survey at bit.ly/CleanEnergyDecaturSurvey.

Atlanta city tree ordinance: City in the Forest (cityintheforest.org) is calling on supporters of a strong update to the Atlanta Tree Ordinance to contact Atlanta city council in support of the "citizens' blended draft" tree ordinance and to sign up for action alerts on their website.

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SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

We don't always realize the impacts a simple act may have on us individually or its consequences. Sam Booher, Savannah River Group's Co-Chair, made one phone call that led to saving thousands of eagles and learning a lesson that he's carried into his retirement.

Atlanta Police Foundation facility in South River Forest, on land leased from the City of Atlanta: According to the Atlanta Community Press Collective's notes on the January 11, 2022, official community stakeholders' meeting about planning for this facility, questions for the community stakeholders can be sent via email at advisoryaptc@gmail.com.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Want to pitch in by helping out at meetings, planning events or actions, or keeping on top of local policies, politics, and opportunities? Please email our chair, Nina Dutton, at nddutton@gmail.com.

STAY UP TO DATE

If you don't get our monthly meeting announcements but would like to, sign up for email updates through the Georgia Chapter website (sierraclub.org/georgia) and be sure to include your Atlanta-area zipcode.

The Metro Atlanta Group generally meets on the second Tuesday of each month. Typically our meetings feature a speaker on a timely topic. Then, we discuss and present info on how to take action on important issues. Some months we do not hold a regular meeting, so please check the Chapter calendar, our webpage, and our Facebook page for updates.

Our executive committee meetings are open and generally held on the evening of the first Tuesday of the month. Contact Nina Dutton (nddutton@gmail.com) to confirm details.

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GROUP INFORMATION

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

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Here's his story:

"In 1981 I was in the U.S. Army stationed at Ft. Sheridan, IL. I saw a photo of three tall lanky cowboys holding Winchester rifles, cradled across their arms, and standing in front of three, chest high piles of dead Golden Eagles. The cowboys alleged that, while grazing their cattle on National Park land, the Golden Eagles were killing the newborn calves. They had written to and received permission from then Secretary of the Interior James Watt to shoot the

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Golden Eagles. This was senseless killing and on public land. It made me angry.

Because my home was in Georgia I wrote to Georgia Senator Sam Nunn telling him I was his constituent and was outraged by the killing of these Golden Eagles and wanted it stopped. As a result, Senator Nunn wrote to tell me he had Secretary Watt conduct a 30-day study to determine the largest animal a Golden Eagle can kill.

After the study was completed, Senator Nunn wrote to me again saying that the study revealed that a prairie dog is the largest animal an eagle can kill; however, if the eagles find a dead calve they will feed on it. Senator Nunn also said he ordered Secretary Watt to revoke all permits to kill Golden Eagles and to never again authorize one to be killed.

WOW! I realized that one person can make a difference if you care about an issue and are willing to do something about it. You can change the way things are done. I carried that lesson into retirement."

Sam retired in 1986 and joined the Sierra Club, initially because of the outings but then became active in leadership roles for both the Georgia Chapter and the Savannah River Group, living the lesson learned because of the Golden Eagles.

In 2022, challenge yourself to do one thing new for the environment. Go on an outing, invite someone to



Sam Booher, right, speaks to a group of folks at an Earth Day event in Augusta in 2019.

join you at a Group monthly meeting, write a letter or make one phone call to your legislator to ask them to vote for or oppose a bill, join a cleanup, or ask any of your Group leaders how you may help. We all can do one thing if it's important to us.

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GROUP INFORMATION

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

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SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER DIRECTORY

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Tim Nelken (SRG)

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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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Political Chair

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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.

The Georgia Chapter ExCom plan to adopt its meeting calendar for 2022 at its January 29 meeting. Watch this space and our website for more information.

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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