

GEORGIA



SIERRAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER • JULY / AUG / SEPT 2021



GET OUTDOORS THIS SUMMER!

INSIDE: MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: LET LOCALS LEAD • SUMMER OF TRANSIT
UPDATE ON THE FOOTHILLS PROJECT • LOCAL GROUP REPORTS AND MORE!

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

BY DANIEL BLACKMAN,
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

There has never been a moment, at least in my lifetime, when the beginning of Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities," was more relevant. As Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wis-



DANIEL BLACKMAN

dom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." That word "epoch" literally means a period of time in history or a person's life, typically one marked by notable events or particular characteristics. And that is where I will begin.

It is exceptional that we are the first generation that can truly end poverty, yet a burden that we are arguably the last generation that can end climate change. Ending poverty and adapting to climate change must be mutually prioritized because both will have profound impacts on our planet and our populations for generations to come. My father, a former United States Army Ranger, would remind me, "I expect you to be able to chew bubblegum and march at the same time." Likewise, I would challenge each of us to see the eradication of

poverty and the mitigation of the climate crisis as something we are well able to accomplish as well as the opportunity of a lifetime.

Climate change hits the poor the hardest, especially those living in vulnerable areas with the fewest resources to help them adapt or recover quickly from the aftermaths of extreme weather events. As the effects of climate change worsen, escaping poverty becomes more difficult. To that end, we now have a window to end extreme poverty and put in place the safety nets that can keep poverty at bay while also cutting emissions. But it is incumbent upon us to develop policy guidance and concrete recommendations that lead to real, measurable, and permanent change.

When I became chair of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, I was uncertain about the journey, but abundantly clear of my commitment: to lead with the awareness that poor people and communities of color have been ignored, underserved, and underrepresented in the climate movement and to fight for environmental justice and equity.

Two of my heroes — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy — understood the importance of giving a voice to the poor and to people of color. Dr. King launched the "Poor People's Campaign" as the next stage of the civil rights movement. It was this strategy, focused on changing the material conditions of poverty for Americans of all races, that led him to Memphis to support striking sanitation workers fighting for a living wage. Senator Kennedy

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On the Cover

Photo: A sign post on the Appalachian Trail in North Georgia.
Credit: Ricky Leroux

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was also focused on the plight of poor people: As he campaigned for president in 1968, he vowed to tackle hunger, poverty, and racial injustice. Just two months and two days after Dr. King's murder, Kennedy was assassinated after winning the California Democratic presidential primary on an anti-poverty platform.

Poverty and the climate crisis have both accelerated in the last decade and have been on a collision course for a very long time. We are clearly the last generation that can change the course of climate change, but we are also the first generation to experience its consequences. Climate change continues to pose a serious risk to poverty reduction and threatens to undo decades of commitment to progress. Even worse, poverty has become more widespread since the COVID-19 pandemic, making poverty reduction harder.

None of us can dispute that climate change is happening and will increasingly affect the poor. Therefore, it is our responsibility to find ways of mainstreaming and integrating adaptation to climate change into poverty reduction and sustainable development efforts while building and strengthening partnerships within our most marginalized communities.

I believe in our professional and personal commitments to clean energy and fighting climate change, so I leave you with a Native American proverb – “We do not inherit the planet from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” Let us recommit ourselves to our most precious natural resource: the generations of tomorrow. Together, I believe we can meet the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own.

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CHAPTER NEWS

UPDATES ON OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

Great news for Sierra Club Outings! Sierra Club plans to begin allowing local outdoor outings again starting the first week of July. There will be some new protocols to protect outings participants from COVID-19. Watch for further upcoming announcements.

Since it has been more than a year since Sierra Club has held formal outings, many of our Outings Leaders may need to get their certifications updated.

Outings Leaders: If you have questions about the new protocols, about Outings Leader trainings, or certification renewal, please check with your Local Group's Outings Chair or e-mail Lee Graham at leegrah3@gmail.com.

In celebration of the return of outings, many of our Outings Leaders share their favorite hikes and paddle trips in our Local Group report section (pages 11-17).

Meanwhile, Chapter staff members will continue to work from home while Sierra Club leaders determine the safest way for staff and volunteers to return to holding in-person meetings. The Chapter office in Decatur remains closed, and our events and meetings will continue to be held virtually.

Meanwhile, the availability of COVID-19 vaccines in Georgia continues to increase. To find a vaccine appointment near you, go to vaccinefinder.org or dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine.

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.

JOIN THE GEORGIA CHAPTER'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE!

The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter Nominating Committee is seeking candidates for the Chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom). Chapter ExCom has oversight responsibility for the Georgia Chapter to ensure that it is carrying out our mission productively. The responsibilities of ExCom can be reviewed on the Chapter website (sierraclub.org/georgia/excom).

If you know someone who would be a capable Chapter ExCom member, or if you are interested in serving yourself, contact Linda McBurney at msmcb@outlook.com by August 14, 2021.

Chapter and Group ExCom candidate statements and any nomination petitions for candidates must be submitted by September 10, 2021. Complete rules for the election can be found at sierraclub.org/georgia/ExComElections2021.

Ballots with candidate statements will be distributed by mail and electronically by October 1, 2021. Ballots must be returned to the Georgia Chapter by 5 p.m. on November 15, 2021. Details for returning ballots and ballot counting will be published on the Chapter website and in the next Sierran.

Municipal Elections '21: Let Locals Lead!

Why this year's local races could be Georgia's most important

BY ANGELA JIANG, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

It's December 5th, 2017, and the stakes are higher than ever in the City of Atlanta runoff elections. What folks might not remember from that night is that many of the races were won on razor thin margins. For example, Keisha Lance Bottoms won the Mayor's race by just 832 votes. District 9 Councilmember Dustin Hillis scraped by with a 124-vote margin. The 2017 election proved that even in the largest city in the state, every vote makes an impact in local elections.

It is now 2021, and most communities in Georgia will have the crucial opportunity to participate in local elections this year. It's also the first year that voters will experience some of the most drastic changes to our voting system in recent history due to the omnibus voter suppression bill that passed earlier this year: Senate Bill 202.

This year, absentee voting will be dramatically reduced, neighbors providing food and water to voters waiting in hours-long lines will be criminalized, and local elections offices will be overwhelmed with costs of an unfunded mandate. How we fare during the elections this year will be the one of the biggest tests of Georgia's progressive organizer community, with lessons learned carrying us into the 2022 midterm elections and beyond.

The power of the Sierra Club lies in our Local Groups and local members and supporters. When these forces are combined, we create a cohesive movement at the state level. Now is the time to get involved with your local elections, to make a vote plan well in advance, and to help us activate the power of local action! The candidates you may choose to support can one day be our best champions of the environment, voting rights, racial and economic justice. Indeed, some of our best allies in our clean energy campaigns are local officials. In the box to the right, we have provided a list of positions up for elections this year near our Local Groups. **And if you're interested in making a difference in our elections and protecting our right to vote this year, sign up for our July Summer Activist Training series (bit.ly/gasc-summer-training).**

Don't see your municipality listed? You can find more information about your local elections by visiting your city or county government's website and navigating to the "Elections" section of the website.

LOCAL RACES ON THE BALLOT IN 2021

Centennial Group - Cobb County

- Acworth: City Council, Mayor
- Austell: City Council
- Kennesaw: City Council
- Marietta: City Council, Mayor
- Powder Springs: Mayor Pro Tem, City Council

Gwinnett Group: Gwinnett County

- Berkeley Lake: City Council
- Buford: Board of Commissioners
- Dacula: Mayor, City Council
- Duluth: City Council
- Grayson: Mayor, City Council
- Lawrenceville: City Council
- Lilburn: Mayor, City Council
- Loganville: Mayor, City Council
- Norcross: Mayor, City Council
- Peachtree Corners: Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Snellville: City Council
- Sugar Hill: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, Council Member
- Suwanee: Mayor, Council Members

LaGrange Group

- LaGrange: Mayor, City Council

Metro Atlanta Group: City of Atlanta, parts of DeKalb, parts of Fulton, and surrounding areas

- City of Atlanta: Mayor, City Council, School Board
- Alpharetta: Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Avondale Estates: City Council
- Brookhaven: Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Chamblee: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Clarkston: Mayor, City Council
- College Park: City Council
- Decatur: Mayor, City Council
- Doraville: City Council
- Dunwoody: City Council
- East Point: Mayor, City Council
- Fairburn: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Hapeville: City Council
- Johns Creek: Mayor, City Council
- Lithonia: City Council
- Pine Lake: City Council
- Roswell: Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem, City Council
- Sandy Springs: Mayor, City Council
- South Fulton: Mayor, City Council
- Stone Mountain: Mayor, City Council
- Stonecrest: City Council
- Tucker: Mayor, City Council

Savannah River Group: Augusta

- Hephzibah: Chair, Board of Commissioners

Concerned about coal ash? Here's how you can get involved

BY NEIL SARDANA, GEORGIA ORGANIZING REPRESENTATIVE, BEYOND COAL CAMPAIGN

We've spent the past few issues of the Georgia Sierran explaining the coal ash issue, and now it's time to take action!

Due to multiple scheduling delays, the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) does not have a clear timeline for the release of coal ash closure permits. The chart we shared in a past issue that listed the expected release schedule is now out of date. Stay informed and help protect Georgians from the dangers of coal ash by taking the actions below!

- GeorgiaCoalAsh.org is our hub for updates, resources, and all things coal ash in Georgia.
 - o Sign up for updates by clicking the "Take Action" button at the top of the page.
 - o Get informed on how coal ash impacts communities in Georgia.
- Connect with us on social media and share with your networks
 - o Join the [Georgia Coal Ash Communities Facebook Group \(facebook.com/groups/georgiacoalash\)](https://www.facebook.com/groups/georgiacoalash) and invite your friends to help build our movement!
- Join our [Georgia Clean Your Ash Meetings \(georgiacoalash.org/updates/organizingmeeting\)](http://georgiacoalash.org/updates/organizingmeeting) every 2nd



- o & 4th Wednesday of every month.
- Watch the [Rising from the Ashes Docuseries \(georgiacoalash.org/#RFTA\)](http://georgiacoalash.org/#RFTA) on Georgia's coal ash problem and [sign up to host a film screening with friends and family \(georgiacoalash.org/updates/gacleanyourash-screening\)](http://georgiacoalash.org/updates/gacleanyourash-screening).
- Be a voice for your community:
 - o Volunteer to help write a letter to the editor for your local news outlet.
 - o Learn about key details of the coal ash issue and be

- o a spokesperson for your community to the Georgia EPD and the media.
- When permits are released, send a comment to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division
 - o Signing up at GeorgiaCoalAsh.org is the best way to get alerted when permits are released.

Feel free to reach out to me, Neil Sardana, at neil.sardana@sierraclub.org with any questions.

CLIMATE ACTION CAMPAIGN

Climate Action Campaign focused on the passage of the American Jobs Plan

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

Our work with the Climate Action Campaign continues with a huge push for infrastructure investment as outlined in the Americans Jobs Plan. President Joe Biden’s \$1.7 trillion proposal for clean energy, civic infrastructure, public transit, and resiliency — as well as a whole slew of other publicly funded programs — is a once-in-a-decade approach to face some of the most underfunded systems in our country.

How can you get involved? We will be hosting events this summer to target our elected officials to get the American Jobs Plan and other critical legislation moving. You can expect digital letter writing events, calls for constituents to message their senators and members of congress, and panels highlighting the effects the plan will have on Georgia.

In case you missed it, last quarter we held a [round-table on the importance of the Department of the Interior for Georgia](#) ([fb.watch/5UE0xQw0Fs](#)), hosted by Moms Clean Air Force, which brought together voices from the Department of Interior, National Parks Conservation Association, and Indigenous community leaders. This conversation tied together this year’s Earth Day theme, “Restore Our Earth,” with a discussion on how the Department of Interior restores Georgia.

Sierra Club also joined a [national policy panel on Georgia and Biden’s joint address to congress](#) ([fb.watch/5UE586Bixf](#)). This event, hosted by Georgia Interfaith Power and Light (GIPL), fell under their arc of Earth Month actions, “Eco Faith from Home.” Panelists included national policy experts from Moms Clean Air Force, GIPL, and Sierra Club’s Climate Policy Director Liz Perera.

Finally, we crafted a [petition for people to raise their voices in celebration of Earth Day](#) ([bit.ly/cacga](#)). Our petition was used for the duration of Earth Month for us and partners to help mobilize folks to take action.

Are you interested in getting involved? Email Georgia Chapter Organizer Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierra-club.org.

CLEAN ENERGY COMMITTEE

The IRP: What is it and why is it so important?

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER, SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

This summer, the Clean Energy Committee is making a transition to organizing around Georgia Power’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). Through the IRP process, Georgia Power will, among other things, outline the sources of the energy it will sell to consumers in our state for the next three years, specifying how much will come from coal, nuclear, natural gas, renewables, etc. The Integrated Resource Plan is how we can influence the state to increase energy efficiency, expand renewables, close coal plants, and advocate for the clean up of coal ash.

This process is an excellent opportunity for the Ready for 100 and Beyond Coal campaigns to coordinate on demands for all.

is the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC). This five-member statewide elected body works in a judicial capacity complete with hearings and testimony during the IRP process. The PSC will also ultimately approve a final version of Georgia Power’s plan. You can be involved in speaking out during the public comment period of these hearings.

The last IRP cycle in 2019 resulted in many wins for our state’s clean energy future: the retirement of two coal plants, no new natural gas infrastructure, an increase in utility scale renewable energy, and a commitment to retrofit 500 homes across the state.

The next IRP cycle will kick off in 2022, and we must be ready to be ready to advocate for the cleaner, brighter future that we all deserve. This time around, we are looking to maximize solar at the utility scale, retire more coal-burning plants, dramatically increase the number of homes receiving energy efficiency measures, and hold strong for no new natural gas. Will you join us? We are kicking off our IRP organizing calls in July and continuing them through to the 2022 IRP cycle.

The main entity for deciding Georgia’s energy future

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In 2019, Sierra Club organized rallies like the one picture above outside the Georgia Public Service Commission offices in Atlanta while Georgia Power's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) was being debated and modified. Our Clean Energy Committee is already preparing for the 2022 IRP cycle.

After Georgia Power outlines how they will source energy for the next three years, it will be time to decide how the plan would be paid for. In the last IRP, The Public Service Commission allowed Georgia Power to recover costs from ratepayers associated with the cleanup of toxic coal ash. We must be ready and willing to fight whatever the Public Service Commission throws our way this time. Consumers should not have to bear the full burden.

counties in Georgia (Atlanta, Athens-Clarke County, Augusta-Richmond County, Clarkston, and Savannah) have already committed to a just transition to 100% clean, renewable energy. In the U.S., eight states (CA, HI, ME, NM, NV, NY, VA, WA), Puerto Rico, and Washington, D.C., have also already made Ready for 100 commitments. One in four Americans now live in a committed location. Can we move the ball here in Georgia?

How does it look to be involved in the Clean Energy Committee? While we're not sure how we will show up and show out for hearings yet, you can expect to be involved in demanding energy justice by the Public Service Commission. We are stronger together, and we're looking forward to collaborating with our partners for unified demands in IRP. The IRP bridges goals of the Ready for 100 and Beyond Coal campaigns, and it's Super Bowl-sized chance to influence a cleaner, greener future.

City, county, and state efforts are important for addressing the climate emergency. The U.S. generates more greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide, per person than any other country by far. Addressing energy production will give the biggest reduction in U.S. emissions in a short time. President Biden has proposed a goal of 100 percent carbon free electricity by 2035. Cities/counties can develop an action plan to transition city/county operations, as well as facilitate the transition by businesses, families, and individuals within their area. They can change building codes and policies, educate the public, and promote and develop incentives to assist consumers and businesses to transition away from fossil fuels. We can do this!

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GETTING READY FOR 100?

100% clean, renewable energy is the focus of the Sierra Club Ready for 100 program. The Clean Energy Committee remains active in pursuing this initiative in Georgia. Active campaigns are ongoing in Decatur and Gwinnett County, and five cities/

Interested in joining one of our Ready For 100 Teams? Email Conservation Organizer Jillian Eller at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org or Ready For 100 Team Leader Scott Presson at spress51@gmail.com.

Working to make Stone Mountain a welcoming outdoor space for all

BY JILLIAN ELLER, CONSERVATION ORGANIZER,
SIERRA CLUB GEORGIA CHAPTER

At its May meeting, the Georgia Chapter's Executive Committee approved the adoption of a new issue: supporting the transformation of Stone Mountain Park into a welcoming outdoor space for all. In accordance with the [National Sierra Club position on Confederate Monuments \(bit.ly/sc-confederate-monuments-position\)](https://bit.ly/sc-confederate-monuments-position), our stance is to “support movement towards the transformation of Stone Mountain Park” with volunteer Tricia Embry as the leader and staff support from Jillian Eller. In coordination with the Stone Mountain Action Coalition, Sierra Club’s national Outdoors for All work, and Sierra Club Military Outdoors, the Georgia Chapter will be engaging members and supporters, uplifting successes toward the park’s transformation, and seeking educational moments to promote a safe and inclusive park.

We support the mission of the [Stone Mountain Action Coalition \(stonemountainaction.org\)](https://stonemountainaction.org) to reclaim Stone Mountain Park from mandated Confederacy memorialization. We join them in calling for immediate changes, including removing Confederate flags, renaming park streets and features currently honoring Confederate and Ku Klux

Klan figures, and advocating for new legislation to address the restrictive Georgia laws that require the park to serve as a Confederate memorial. We support and elevate community processes where those most closely impacted by this threatening reminder (i.e., Black, Indigenous and other people of color; city of Stone Mountain residents; residents of Georgia) lead the transformation of the park.

Since we have taken this stance on Confederate memorialization at Stone Mountain, there are already some small changes in the works worth celebrating, although our efforts are far from over. On May 24th, the Stone Mountain Memorial Association (SMMA) voted to develop an exhibit “telling the truth” about the history of the park, to relocate Confederate flags from the walk-up trail (to an equally prominent location at Valor Park near the Summit Skyride, however), and remove the carving from the SMMA logo. In advance of this meeting, we garnered 190 comments from members and supporters in favor of making even more sweeping changes at the park. Promising work is being done, and there’s still more to go: renaming the streets that bear the names of Confederate and KKK leaders, the total removal of Confederate flags, and a community process to assess the management and future of the carving. Those are changes we can speak out on right now. The Sierra Club Georgia Chapter has an opportunity to be on the right side of history by leaning into our principles of equity, inclusion, and diversity and our mission to enable all people to explore, enjoy and protect the planet through the transformation of Stone Mountain Park.

Interested in getting involved? Email Jillian at jillian.eller@sierraclub.org.



In May, the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter adopted a new issue: supporting the movement towards the transformation of Stone Mountain Park to make it a welcoming place for all.

**REGIONAL ACTION TO IMPROVE
LIVABILITY (R.A.I.L.) COMMITTEE**

The Summer of Transit!

BY TEJAS KOTAK, CHAIR, R.A.I.L. COMMITTEE

The next few months are going to be a Summer of Transit. There are multiple important transit and transportation plans in the Atlanta region that need our attention and advocacy. These plans will form the foundation of what could be built in the coming years — we need to get visionary goals and projects like regional rail and expansive bus networks in these plans to make sure they have a chance of happening.

There are two major types of plans happening: Transit Master Plans and Comprehensive Transportation Plans.

Transit Master Plans (TMPs) are county-level plans that focus on a 30-year vision of building transit systems that create connectivity both within the county and to the wider metro region. There are several counties in the outer metro that are developing their first ever TMPs. Bringing high-quality transit to these counties will create better connections between jobs, health care, and people that will all be necessary as the region’s population is expected to grow by 3 million people over the next few decades. We need to push for big and visionary transit expansions to ensure a sustainable future. The following counties are undertaking these ambitious efforts:

- **Forsyth County** (forsythco.com/linkforsyth)
- **Henry County** (henrytransitmasterplan.com/schedule.html)
- **Spalding County** (spaldingcounty.com/transit-master-plan)
- **Newton County** (movingnewton.com/participate-now)

WILDLANDS & WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

The Foothills Landscape Project evolves

**BY JESS RIDDLE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
GEORGIA FORESTWATCH**

After a hiatus of more than a year, rounds of public meetings in April announced major changes to the Foothills Landscape Project.

Spread across half the width of Georgia, the Foothills

All these plans have public engagement opportunities through surveys and public meetings — many of which will be virtual and easy to access. Climate-focused Sierrans should attend these meetings and advocate for electric buses, frequent bus service, all-day regional bus service, better airport connections, better fare integration so that payment is easy and equitable, and regional rail that connects the entire metro.

Comprehensive Transportation Plans are also 30-year plans from counties. They are broader in focus and consider the future of roads, bridges, trails, new technology, and transit.

- **Douglas County** (douglascountyctp.com)
- **Cobb County** (cobbcounty.org/transportation/planning/comprehensive-transportation-plan/feedback)
- **Coweta County** (cowetactp.com/index.html)
- **DeKalb County** (dekalb2050unifiedplan.com/index.html)

Sierrans should engage in these plans to advocate for expansive transit visions, a fix-it-first mentality for roads (maintain what we have before jumping to expensive road widenings), building a **regional trail network** (bit.ly/sc-regional-trail-map), and the necessities of sidewalks and bike lanes.

These plans will shape the future of the Atlanta region and are vital as the federal government makes moves to substantially increase funding to green transportation projects. The feds will only fund projects that have gone through these local planning efforts, so we need to take advantage of these opportunities to lay a strong and forward-looking foundation of great transit and transportation projects.

Reach out to Tejas Kotak at tkotak013@gmail.com if you have any questions on how to be involved in these planning efforts or want to be more engaged in the R.A.I.L. Committee.

Landscape Project could result in intensive logging of mature forests, herbicide application on a scale never before seen, and the spoiling of recreation areas. Alternatively, the Foothills Landscape Project could result in improved chances for rare species, the remediation of past poor management, and the enhancement of recreation opportunities. The dramatic range of possibilities comes from the project’s huge footprint — the project covers an area the size of Zion National Park — and ambition to manage everything from ecosystems to infrastructure.

Since its debut in 2016, Foothills has been presented

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as a “collaborative” project. Recent meetings have focused on laying the foundation for a Foothills “working group,” a stakeholder group that would guide the implementation of the project. At the first meeting, participants – a roughly even mix of government staff and representatives of various nonprofits – were broken into groups of three or four and asked: What is important to your organization about the Foothills Project? What is possible with the Foothills collaboration? What are the obstacles to successful collaboration?

One of the strongest themes at the first set of meetings was the desire to make the Foothills collaboration more inclusive. There was broad recognition that the project will impact many groups that have not historically participated in Forest Service projects.

The next meeting featured presentations by participants from a long-running collaborative on a national forest in Colorado and a researcher who has studied several national forest collaboratives. They shared what has worked in Colorado, challenges in making that collaborative function, and patterns in what collaboratives generally need to succeed.

In the course of these meetings and discussions, the Forest Service laid out a new plan for how Foothills will move forward that includes restructuring the collaborative and the decision making process. The Forest Service clearly said they will issue a revised environmental assessment for the project, which will come with a new public comment period. They are hoping to release the new environmental assessment this summer. It will be programmatic: it will lay out management treatment options and analyze potential impacts of those management techniques that would be common to all sites, but would not authorize on-the-ground operations. Streamlined individual environmental assessments would then be issued to cover decisions about what specific sites to treat and to analyze the impacts to those specific sites.

This new approach matches what ForestWatch and our partners have been recommending to fix legal, public participation, and ultimately environmental problems with the original project design. The new approach abandons previous plans to describe the kinds of places the Forest Service would log, burn, reroute trails, etc., without identifying the actual locations until after legally binding public input opportunities were closed. The new nested approach still offers the Forest Service efficiency gains by greatly reducing repeated analysis, prioritizing treatments



Photo courtesy of Georgia ForestWatch

A forest stand thinned, partially logged, and burned as part of the Water Gauge Project, one of the most recently completed projects in the Foothills landscape.

across a broader landscape, and increasing coordination among timber, fire, road, and recreation divisions.

Exactly how the working group will function is still uncertain. The Forest Service will host five two-hour meetings to develop a proposal for the working group’s purpose and structure. One goal for the proposal is to address the questions and concerns that surfaced in the April meetings. The meetings will start in June or July, and the proposal will be subject to ratification by both the working group and the Forest Service.

Overall, the Forest Service’s approach has changed for the better. The changes in the decision-making process are significant improvements. We still need to see this new approach put in writing, and there are still obstacles that must be overcome for the project to have a positive outcome. Stakeholders will have to actually want to collaborate. They will have to see the advantages of working with other stakeholders rather than just digging in their heels and demanding everything be done their way. To keep discussions focused on common ground and away from pointless debates, the project will need focused goals. Practical constraints imposed on the project by regulations, staffing, and budget will also have to be made clear.

Those challenges notwithstanding, there is now a path forward. We will just have to stay involved to make sure it leads to a good outcome.

SUMMER 2021 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

WELCOME SUMMER! WELCOME THE RETURN (SOON) TO FORMAL OUTINGS!

Anticipating our post-COVID return to formal Sierra Club outings this summer & fall, we asked a few Centennial Group leaders to name a personal favorite trail or outing.

- **Lee Graham (leegrah3@gmail.com):** One of my favorite outings (I last hiked in February 2021) is the Grand Canyon of the Tennessee portion of the Cumberland Trail starting at Signal Mountain in Chattanooga. You will enjoy great views on high ridges above the Tennessee River. Check with me for more details and other suggestions.
- **Connie Dassinger (ccdassinger@yahoo.com):** One of my favorite hikes is the Bear Creek Trail north of Ellijay. It's about 90 minutes from Kennesaw up I-575, and shares a small part of its trail with the Pinhoti Trail. During rainy times, there are several wet foot crossings and one wet foot crossing at the end that is near the parking area. You can see the "Gennett Poplar" about a mile in, which is named for the family that owned a local lumber mill and sold the property to the U.S. government. It's said to be the second largest living tree in Georgia. You can follow Bear Creek for several miles with lots of rhododendrons and some nice flowing water. Some of the trail follows old logging roads and is easier to hike. It is best to do this hike during the week when you will encounter fewer hikers and mountain bikers.
- **Cynthia Patterson (cynthia.5.patterson@gmail.com):** The Pine Log Creek Trail, northeast of Cartersville, is a favorite hiking destination. Steep, single-file trails wind through diverse forest habitats. Every season has something to offer: spring flowers, cooling shade, fall foliage, and winter vistas. Of special note: Pine Log Creek Trail is the former home of the Cherokee people, who lived along the creek's banks. The trail is a



Photos from three of the Centennial Group's pre-COVID outings.

4.5-mile moderate, double loop featuring pine and hardwood forests, wooded glades filled with ferns, bridges over streams, and a look at an historic Civilian Conservation Corps quarry. It is suggested to hike the West Loop first because it is longer than the East Loop. The unmarked spur to the C.C.C. quarry is on the east side of the East Loop, and travels downhill and across a short bridge to the stunning quarry pond. Shaded rocks on the far side of the pond are a perfect spot to have a picnic, watch the fish, and listen to the

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birds. The folded, ribbon-like rocks are evidence of the Cartersville Fault, where Piedmont metamorphic rocks were forced across sedimentary rock layers. Trailhead address: 4031 GA-140, Rydal, GA 30171.

- **Bob Springfield (bob@bobspringfield.com):** A long-time favorite of mine (for several decades) and a close-by, local destination is the East Palisades Trail of the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area. It is an especially scenic and historic five-mile hike along the Chattahoochee River north of Atlanta inside I-285. The route includes a high-cliff view of the river and a special treat: an impressive forest of very large mature bamboo! An NPS trail map (listed as Palisades east of river) can be found at nps.gov/chat/planyourvisit/maps.htm. See you outside!

JUNETEENTH

We were happy to see the return of the “Cobb NAACP Annual Juneteenth Festival” on the Marietta Square on June 19th after its cancellation in 2020. The Centennial Group has a longstanding relationship with the Cobb Branch of the NAACP, and we are always eager to help promote and support this cultural & historic event.



GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

SERVING GWINNETT COUNTY

BY DAN FRIEDMAN, CHAIR,
GREATER GWINNETT GROUP

Happy summer! Who would have thought six months ago we would be coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, we would have an administration that takes the climate threat seriously, that Georgia would have a huge new car battery plant, and we would have two new senators.

The weather has been perfect for getting outside and enjoying the parks and wild places around Gwinnett. We look forward over the summer months to building on our success in stream monitoring and cleaning up parks and lands near rivers, streams, highways, and roads under the leadership of Michael Hallen, shown in the photo on the right. These clean-ups enable us to be out in fresh air – a welcomed change from being separated and home-bound due to COVID-19 over the last 15 months – but also give a feeling of being productive and helping to keep our county clean.

RECENT MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

We are grateful to the guest speakers who brought info to our recent group meetings:

- April 1st – Equity & Inclusion in Transit Planning: Chris Hall, Tejas Kotak, Matt Stigall (Sierra Club & Cobb4Transit leaders)
- May 6th – Water Quality and Public Health: Dr. Yolanda Whyte (pediatrician & environmental health consultant)
- June 3rd – The Papayago Parrot Rescue House of Cobb County: Tulan Avard & Marie Sullivan (rescue & re-homing experts).

NOTE: We plan to take a group meeting hiatus in July and August, but please remember to check our E-newsletter, Facebook page, Meetup page, and our website for announcements about any special gatherings or activities we might schedule this summer. Thank you.



GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/centennial
Facebook: facebook.com/Centennial.Sierra.Club
MeetUp: meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club



Besides enjoying the weather and helping to clean up the environment, getting out with old friends as well as new friends is fun and lasting relationships have been formed.



GROUP INFORMATION

Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Gwinnett
Facebook: facebook.com/Gwinnett-Sierra-Club-109645614080930

LAGRANGE GROUP

SERVING THE LAGRANGE AREA

BY MARY LOU DABBS, CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP & **SAM BREYFOGLE**, CONSERVATION CHAIR, LAGRANGE GROUP

The LaGrange Group has recently enjoyed several shared membership meetings with the Savannah River Group, and has had one presentation by Becky Griffin from the University of Georgia Extension Service about Georgia's Great Pollinator Census. Don't miss the opportunity to participate in the count this August (ggapc.org) and make your contribution to science!

We spent a busy spring getting this year off to a good start. After cleaning and replanting our pollinator garden and cleaning and installing new bluebird boxes, we're now ready to enjoy summer.

One of our favorite outdoor activities involves exploring The Thread, our multi-use trail. The Thread is an environmentally sensitive, non-motorized, multipurpose trail designed to provide opportunities for fitness, recreation, transportation, and special events. (More info available at thethreadtrail.org and facebook.com/TheThreadTrail). About 10 of the 29 projected miles of the 12 foot wide trail are completed, and it provides a great way to walk or bike through several neighborhoods of LaGrange, where you can make stops near water features, sports fields, and even two local breweries (Wild Leap and Beacon). You can also see our Sierra Club pollinator garden and many of the bluebird boxes we have installed and continue to monitor along the route.

Another of our favorite go-to outings is a short four-mile paddle on the Chattahoochee River below West Point Dam down to West Point, Georgia. The take-out may be extended to several locations further downstream for the ambitious. These activities, focused on a beautiful reach of the river, give us the opportunity to enjoy a unique, clear water river where a summer swim and a picnic with others is relaxing and enjoyable. Often, bald eagles and ospreys can be spotted along this stretch of river.

Canoe and/or kayak outings at low water prior to water releases from the dam are ideal for a lazy paddle in the cool water almost any time of year. (Because the river is regulated by the West Point dam, call



Photos from the LaGrange Group's pre-COVID outings paddling down the Chattahoochee River.

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at 706-645-2929 the morning of your float to verify the water release schedule.) There is a canoe livery that can provide shuttle services out of West Point that may make the activity simpler.

We hope you have a chance to get into the outdoors this summer with family and friends. Protecting these unique environments is why we do the work we do in the Sierra Club. Join us outdoors — and in the work!



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METRO ATLANTA GROUP

SERVING ATLANTA, DEKALB & SOUTH FULTON

BY NINA DUTTON, CHAIR, METRO ATLANTA GROUP

GROUP MEETINGS

Until Sierra Club changes its COVID-19 policies, we will continue to hold group meetings virtually, with the option to call in from a phone line or participate from a computer or smartphone. Even when we eventually begin meeting in person again, we intend to include a remote option for accessibility. 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!

In lieu of a typical group meeting in April 2021, Metro Atlanta Group invited members and volunteers to the Georgia Chapter's Earth Day Eve celebration: an online screening of "Rising from the Ashes," the new three-part documentary series about the dangers of coal ash in Georgia. A Q&A session featuring the filmmakers, community members featured in the film, and staff from Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign followed the screening. The release of the documentary this spring was timely because over the next several months, the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) will accept public comments about Georgia Power's plans to deal with its toxic coal ash ponds across Georgia. Haven't seen "Rising from the Ashes" yet? You can watch the short docuseries, get involved in the push for safe and responsible cleanup of Georgia Power's toxic coal ash, and even sign up to host your own community screening of the film at georgiacoalash.org.

In May, our meeting's featured speaker was Natasha Dyer, senior recycling coordinator with the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Resilience (and member of the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter's Executive Committee). Ms. Dyer discussed with our group the social and environmental impacts of food waste (nrhc.org/food-waste), as well as her work on city programs to recover and distribute edible food, prevent food waste, and support urban agriculture through composting. Some takeaway points from this meeting included:

- Current or upcoming City of Atlanta policies and programs to distribute food to those who need it and prevent food waste include changes to zoning laws to allow sale of produce where it's grown, health inspectors spreading info to restaurants about how to share extra food, and expanding community composting programs.

- At a household level, we can do our part by keeping food out of the trash; keep track of what food you have, use it wisely to prevent waste, and compost if possible.
- At a systems level: we need to have more ways to handle (and use) waste locally and develop more circular economies. For example, not everyone has the space or desire to deal with a compost pile at home, but public composting at apartment complexes or at the neighborhood level prevents food waste from having to be hauled long distances. Compost created in town can then be used at nearby urban farms and community gardens to grow more food in healthy soil.

The jumping-off point for our June meeting was Intrenchment Creek and how rainfall so often results in the creek flooding into nearby neighborhoods in areas of south and southeast Atlanta. Featured speaker Jason Dozier of the Intrenchment Creek Community Stewardship Council (ICCSC) (intrenchmentatl.org) spoke about the organization's equity-focused advocacy campaigns to prevent flooding and flooding-related displacement of residents. Aiming to protect the Intrenchment Creek watershed basin through the empowerment of residents to improve conditions in their own neighborhoods, the ICCSC is "working to reverse decades of environmental injustice impacting the residents of our south Atlanta communities." Our discussion touched upon specific structures and strategies to manage stormwater (such as those compiled in this task force report: bit.ly/5pdeg8U), as well as on the history of ICCSC as it grew in part out of past efforts of the Turner Field Community Benefits Coalition (turnerfieldcoalition.org).

SOUTH RIVER FOREST UNDER THREATS

Where southeast Atlanta meets DeKalb County, the forest is under two major threats. In April, the Atlanta mayor's office announced plans to build a 150-acre police training facility on an area of the forest known as the Old Atlanta Prison Farm, which is in DeKalb County but owned by the city of Atlanta. As the Intrenchment Creek Community Stewardship Council has pointed out (bit.ly/3jgdq1x), this proposal goes against the 2017 Atlanta City Design Plan (atlcitydesign.com/city-design) adopted by the Atlanta City Council, which calls for protection of the forest at the Old Atlanta Prison Farm and other nearby forest areas as a South River Park.

Meanwhile, the movie studio Blackhall Studios has had plans in the works for years to take ownership

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of part of what is now Intrenchment Creek Park as part of a "land swap" with DeKalb County. In April, Blackhall Studios was sold to a Los-Angeles-based company. Made with "no conditions," this sale upends any certainty around the commitments the former owner of Blackhall made to the local community during land swap negotiations.

Flowing through this forest are the South River and creeks feeding into it. The South River was named one of America's most endangered rivers in 2021 (bit.ly/3x5TcGx), calling attention to the environmental injustice of how the frequent sewage spills into this river affect the surrounding community, where mainly Black residents live. Prevention of sewage spills into the river in the first place is desperately needed, but so too is keeping a healthy forest growing around the river and the creeks flowing into it. Healthy forests clean water entering the rivers that flow through them and can help prevent flooding into nearby neighborhoods (not to mention the air quality, cooling, and climate benefits of forests, as well as the social benefits of forests open to the public).

Community members working to protect the forest for all are gathering information, resources, events, and calls to action at this link: linktr.ee/DefendAtlantaForest.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Want to pitch in by helping out at meetings, planning events or actions, or keeping on top of local news, policy, politics, events, 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 zip code.

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.

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Facebook: facebook.com/SierraClubATL

SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

SERVING AUGUSTA & SURROUNDING AREAS

BY LINDA MCBURNEY, CO-CHAIR, SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

We have missed getting together to go on outings and are so looking forward to starting them again. Some of our most popular outings include:

FULL MOON PADDLES

We have done paddles under the beams of a full moon at two different locations. One has been a nine to 12-mile paddle on the Augusta Canal, starting from the Savannah River Rapids Old Lock & Dam down to the end of the upper level of the canal at downtown Augusta.

Another favorite location is the 6.2-mile circle around German (pronounced Ger-Maine) Island on the Savannah River. We launch at the Betty's Branch boat ramp at Riverside Park, Columbia County, and paddle upstream on the inner channel of the Savannah River



Savannah River Group members on a pre-COVID midnight paddle.

known as Little River. At the top of German Island we turn back downstream to completely circle the Island and end the trip back where we started. Either day or night, this is an immensely popular kayak route because paddling a complete circular route eliminates having to ferry, drop, and park a vehicle downstream as most of our other kayak outings require.

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KAYAKING THE DEEPSTEP

The Deepstep tributary is a unique backwater wetlands area off the Savannah River, accessible through a narrow passage on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River just upstream from the Stevens Creek Dam and about a mile below the Highway 28 bridge. The length of this paddle can range from three to six miles, and, depending on the season, we often see large flocks of migrating birds in the open lagoon.



PHINIZY SWAMP NATURE PARK HIKES/BIKE RIDES

Phinizy Swamp Nature Park has been the location for Augusta's Earth Day celebration for several years. As part of the celebration and at other times throughout the year, some of our outing leaders have led hikes, bike rides, and coordinated bird walks at the park ranging from one to seven miles. These are "easy" outings because the ground is mostly level throughout the park and you'll see a variety of wildlife and diverse plant life. Just be aware because you may spot an alligator sometimes on the trail, so no small dogs need apply!



sometimes on the trail, so no small dogs need apply!

THE NORTH AUGUSTA GREENEWAY BICYCLE RIDE

This leisurely 12-mile round trip bicycle ride is on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River on the Greenway and goes through North Augusta, Hammond's Ferry, the Brickyard Ponds, and the development area on the Savannah River front. This

is an ideal bike ride for beginners, families, and those who have not been on a bicycle in a while. (Refer to the article by Bill Jackson on The North Augusta Greenway urban outing on the next page).

CONGAREE NATIONAL PARK HIKE

Congaree National Park has the largest tract of old growth bottomland hardwood forest left in the United States and the largest trees in the southeast. There is an option to take either a three-mile or easy seven-mile hike along an interpretive boardwalk that traverses swampland and hardwoods within the Park.

MISTLETOE STATE PARK HIKE

Mistletoe State Park offers a few different hikes varying in length and challenge. We usually choose the six-mile Rock Dam Trail loop that goes through pine and hardwood forests with several stream crossings to add a bit of a challenge to the hike.

HITCHCOCK WOODS HIKE

Hitchcock Woods is in Aiken, SC, and is among the largest urban forests in the nation with about 2,100 acres of forest habitat. This five-mile hike is through a deep sandhills longleaf pine ecosystem.

AUGUSTA CANAL BICYCLE RIDE

There are two different popular bicycle rides along the Augusta Canal. One is an easy eight-mile bike ride along the tree-lined Augusta Canal towpath to downtown Augusta. The other is a 16-20 mile "Freeze Your Buns" Bicycle Ride along the historic Augusta Canal to downtown Augusta held on January 1 in the past few years.



Hikes with or without your dog, trips to the zoo in Columbia, South Carolina, and our annual picnic are other favorite outings among our members.

Thanks to these current and former outings leaders for these fun-filled outings: Lawrence Komp, Dawn Gavigan, Richard Dillenbeck, Cathy Black, Bill Jackson, and Tim Nelken.

If you have an interest in being an outings leader or have suggestions for outings contact Cathy Black, SRG Outings Chair, at sonnyandcathyblack@gmail.com.

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**A SIERRA CLUB OUTING URBAN EXPERIENCE:
THE NORTH AUGUSTA GREENEWAY TRAIL**

BY BILL JACKSON, MEMBERSHIP SERVICES,
SAVANNAH RIVER GROUP

The Greenway Trail is located across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia, in North Augusta, South Carolina. Named after former Mayor Thomas W. Greene, the North Augusta Greenway follows an abandoned right-of-way of the former Central of Georgia Railway (later the Central Rail Road and Banking Company of Georgia).

The trail meanders 6.5 miles (one way) through the riverfront community of North Augusta. A 1.5-mile extension off the Greenway takes you along the Savannah River and through Hammonds Ferry and Riverside Village, where there are numerous eateries and other amenities, including the Green Jackets Ballpark. It climbs only 200 feet or so over its route from the River Club Golf Course on the Savannah River through residential neighborhoods and wooded alcoves to its northern terminus above Bergen Road, north of I-20. Despite the dense suburban setting, a careful trail design engenders a surprisingly natural

environment. Buffering much of the route is a 100-foot-wide, wooded right-of-way that provides habitat for native birds, deer and other wildlife. Along some stretches of trail, a lush canopy of leaves provides a shady retreat through beautiful hardwood forest. Other sections offer wide-open spaces, glimpses of neighborhoods, native wildlife, and breathtaking views of the Savannah. Such conscientious environmental planning has earned the Greenway federal designation as a National Recreation Trail.



Info adapted from TrailLink.com & DiscoverSouthCarolina.com

GROUP INFORMATION

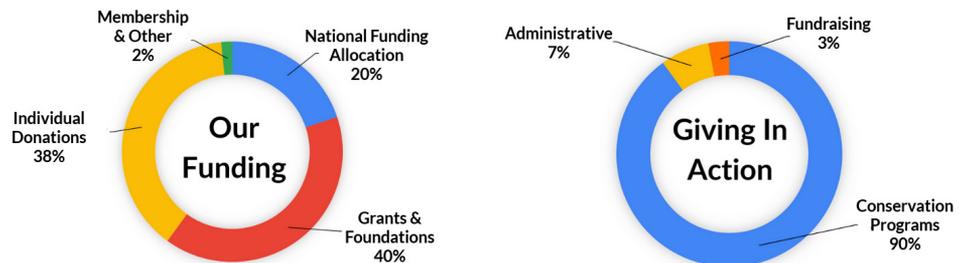
Website: sierraclub.org/georgia/Savannah-River
Facebook: facebook.com/groups/241982449162866

Make a local impact by giving to the Georgia Chapter!

Did you know **less than 5%** of your annual membership dues goes back to the Georgia Chapter?

When you donate directly to the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter, 100% of your gift stays in Georgia and helps support our local conservation programs.

38% of our income comes from individual donors. We are expecting a decline in these donations this year due to COVID-19. If you are able to give, we hope you'll consider making a gift.



Make a gift the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter!

Enclosed is my gift to the Sierra Club Georgia Chapter:
\$250__ \$100__ \$50__ Other:\$__

Please make your check payable to
"Sierra Club Georgia Chapter"

Mail to:
743 E College Ave, Suite B
Decatur, GA 30030

Give online: www.sierraclub.org/georgia/give

To pay by credit card, please fill out this form

MasterCard Visa Discover Amex

Name: _____

Credit Card #: _____

Exp. Date: _____ Amount: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

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2021 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's remaining 2021 meetings are scheduled for:

- July 17 - Noon
- September 18 - Noon
- November 20 - Noon

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Change service requested

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