



**SIERRA CLUB**  
GEORGIA CHAPTER

**Savannah River Group**

Dear Savannah River Group Friend,

Happy summer members and friends of the Sierra Club Savannah River Group! Time to get out and experience the great outdoors. We are so fortunate to have so many National and State Parks available to us. I hope you can take advantage of visiting some of these beautiful places this summer.

The Sierra Club Savannah River Group's summer hiatus is almost over. Next month, we're resuming our outings and monthly meetings, plus we have our annual picnic in just two weeks!

**Cathy Black**

Co-Chair & Outings Chair  
Savannah River Group

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## Upcoming meetings

**Tuesday, September 17, 6:30 PM:** For many people across the CSRA, driving a personal vehicle is simply not an option. Come join us as Brian Mosely (Walton Options) and Wallace White (AARP) discuss the many challenges people with some limitations face with our public transportation system.

To Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87206984512>

Meeting ID: 872 0698 4512

Phone: 646 558 8656

or find your local number: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87206984512>

**Tuesday, October 15, 6:30 PM:** Come out to meet candidates running for the Georgia Legislature. This informal setting is an opportunity for you to ask them questions and share your concerns and also for the candidates to share their positions on issues, or just simply to say hello! In case you don't know the districts you are in, we will help you identify them or

you can go to the Georgia Secretary of State's [My Voter Page](#). For more information contact either Frank Carl ([frankcarl@knology.net](mailto:frankcarl@knology.net)) or Tim Nelken ([td.nelken@gmail.com](mailto:td.nelken@gmail.com)).

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The Savannah River Group is glad to offer our members and supporters the option to attend our hybrid meetings either in person or virtually via Zoom. Both in-person and virtual attendees are encouraged to RSVP using the links below to help us plan our meetings. For those attending in-person, we meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church at 3501 Walton Way Extension, Augusta. For those attending virtually, you will receive a Zoom link via email after you RSVP using the links in this email.

The Savannah River Group holds six Executive Committee (ExCom) meetings each year, always on the fourth Monday of the month. ExCom meetings for 2024 are scheduled for February 26, April 22, June 24, August 26, October 28, and December 30, all starting at 6:30 PM. Any Sierra Club members are welcome to join. For more information, contact Cathy Black at [sonnyandcathyblack@gmail.com](mailto:sonnyandcathyblack@gmail.com).

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## Upcoming outings

**Saturday, September 14, 11 AM-3 PM - Savannah River Group Annual Picnic:** We're having a party! Join us for our annual potluck picnic at the Franke Pavilion in Pendleton King Park (1600 Troupe St., Augusta) for lots of great food and company! All are invited. Please bring a meat you wish to grill, a covered dish to share, and any drinks you will need. Condiments, plates, cups, and ice will be provided. [Learn more and RSVP at this link:](#)  
<https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7013q0000029mOGAAY>

**Saturday, October 5, 10 AM - Rock Dam Trail at Mistletoe State Park:** (7 miles, moderate 2 mph) Rock Dam Trail makes you feel like you are in the foothills. We will do a fall hike through pine uplands and hardwood bottoms and make four stream crossings. There is a \$5 parking fee, but state park passes are available at your local library for free. Bring lots of water, good hiking shoes/boots, and lunch. Limit 15. Contact Outings Leader Richard Dillenbeck at [rvdillenbeck@knology.net](mailto:rvdillenbeck@knology.net) or 706-869-8770. [Learn more and RSVP at this link:](#) <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=701Po00000LSg56IAD>

**Saturday, October 19, 10 AM - Savannah River Shores Hike:** (4 miles, easy) Join us for a beautiful fall hike as we rediscover urban Augusta and North Augusta around the Savannah River. We will start at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta. Various venues will be pointed out in downtown Augusta as we hike down to Freedom Bridge and cross over the Savannah River to North Augusta. In North Augusta, we will see Brick Pond Park, the Green Jackets baseball stadium, Hammonds Ferry, the Savannah River shoreline, and part of the North Augusta Greenway. We will make our way to the 13th Street Bridge completing the loop to the trailhead at the Morris Museum. Parking to be announced. Wear hiking shoes, bring water, snacks. Contact Outings Leader Richard Dillenbeck at [rvdillenbeck@knology.net](mailto:rvdillenbeck@knology.net) or 706-869-8770. [Learn more and RSVP at this link:](#) <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=701Po00000LSEghIAH>

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## Upcoming events

**Adopt-A-Stream:** Our Adopt-A-Stream team meets every month to test the water in our local streams. Contact [Frank Carl](#) if you would like to participate.

Upcoming water monitorings:

September 1, 2, & 3

**Transportation:** Augusta Transit Citizen's Advisory Committee (TCAC) is currently seeking new members. Members must live in Richmond County. The committee meets every month on the fourth Thursday at 4 PM. Please contact Oliver Page for further information: 706-823-4400 or [Opage@augustaga.gov](mailto:Opage@augustaga.gov).

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The Sierra Club and partners transportation committee has been working hard. We meet the 3rd Saturday of each month from 1 to 3 PM at the Savannah Riverkeeper's office, 328 Riverfront Drive, Augusta.

**Nature Artist:** Mark Albertin, an Augusta filmmaker, photographer, and longtime friend and supporter of Sierra Club and our Savannah River Group, will have a special exhibit later this year titled "Sacred Waters of the Okefenokee: The View in Black and White - Photographic studies documenting the beauty and mystery of a rare and endangered environment."

The exhibit will run from Dec. 6 to Jan. 17 at Candl Fine Art, 1128 Broad Street, Augusta. Mark your calendar to see this special exhibit.

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## Conservation Update

### **Data Centers: A blessing or a curse?**

Governor Kemp sees them as a blessing. The Georgia Legislature? Not so much.

For those who may not know what data centers are, they are, most simply, large buildings with huge numbers of computers. They act as "the cloud" for our computing needs. They are the memory and functional operating system for our online activities, and they are essential for modern communication. Some communities are welcoming them in with an eye toward a rising tax base.

So, what is not to like? All of this seems pretty positive. However, these data centers use huge amounts of electricity and water for cooling. And unfortunately, the spike in electricity demand from the rush of new data centers in Georgia have created an environmental problem, one that the legislature wanted to address.

Back in 2018, the Georgia Legislature passed a tax break for data centers in order to attract them to Georgia. That incentive worked: Several massive new data centers have been constructed and begun operations with many more in the pipeline. The economic impacts of

data centers may not be as much as envisioned by those elected leaders who enticed them here. After construction is complete, data centers employ a small number of people, and the large numbers of computers they contain are mostly manufactured elsewhere.

Furthermore, the power requirements for data centers have led to utilities like Georgia Power scrambling to bring more electric capacity to the grid. Indeed, the electricity demand from data centers alone has already outstripped the power generated by the two new nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle near Waynesboro. And as more data centers come online, more power generation will be required.

Georgia Power is seeking to meet that spike in demand with fossil fuels and recently got approval from the Georgia Public Service Commission to build three new oil and methane gas burning turbines at Plant Yates in Newnan County. Of course, burning more fossil fuels will produce heat trapping gas and further exacerbate climate change, making the planet warmer, and, among other things, requiring more power-guzzling air conditioning.

The way out of this cycle appears to be the generation of electricity without an accompanied increase in CO<sub>2</sub>. Direct conversion of sunlight to electricity by photovoltaic cells is already available with no generation of CO<sub>2</sub>, but with solar power comes with space, manufacturing, and storage requirements that make this method of electricity generation challenging.

Radionuclide decay generates energy that can be used in place of burning coal or gas to generate the heat to drive the turbines that create electricity in power plants. Plant Vogtle uses this method. The volume of waste generated by nuclear decay is much smaller than the volume of CO<sub>2</sub> generated by burning fossil fuels, but is also much more dangerous. And the source of energy called biomass is simply using fossil fuels before they are old enough to be called fossil fuels.

Other potential sources of energy are available, such as wind and tides, but their episodic occurrence does not lend themselves to a constant base supply. They can be very useful as supplements to the base source, but the base source must be capable of supplying the energy as needed because our storage capabilities are still in developmental stages. In short, these are difficult questions our state must answer, but the impact on climate change must be a factor for decision makers. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case with our current elected officials.

Getting back to the disagreement between the Governor and the Legislature: Lawmakers thought the drawbacks of data centers were sufficient enough to eliminate the state tax incentive that attracted data centers to the state. So the Legislature passed a law to put a pause on the tax break and give the state time to address the energy issues that data centers bring with them.

The Governor disagreed. He wanted the incentive to continue, so he vetoed that bill. That is where the situation stands at this writing. If we think that data centers should pay their fair share in taxes, we can contact the Governor and ask him not to veto the bill in the Legislature's next session, and we can encourage our state lawmakers to bring up the issue again in 2025.

**Dr. Frank Carl**

Conservation Chair, Savannah River Group

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## Transportation Update

I became interested in working to improve transportation options in 2020. As the pandemic unfolded and I made my way to work each day, I knew that I wanted to weigh in on work that would be hyper local and make a direct impact. The more I learned and thought about it, the more I felt transportation would be one of the most important topics for our community to get involved with.

What I knew at the time was that transportation represented the greatest opportunity to address carbon emissions and to fight for a stable climate. As I dug into the topic, I also saw that it was the “perfect” issue for our community to get involved with. Many people (myself included) would gladly ride public transportation if it were accessible where they live. If you have access to a personal vehicle, you know the pain of monthly car payments, car repairs, maintenance, and climbing gas prices. A more robust public transportation system can save us money!

Speaking out for better public transportation not only offers opportunities to address climate

change, but it also leads to cleaner air and better health outcomes across our community. A stronger public transportation system also makes our community more equitable: There are those in the greater CSRA that cannot afford to own a personal vehicle or have disabilities that prevent them from driving that depend on public transportation options.

As I learned more about what makes public transportation systems successful, I quickly found out how complex the issue is. Beyond the first questions transit riders ask (Can I use transit to get to my destination? How quickly can I get there? How often do the buses run?), there are also questions about the system's infrastructure (Is there a covered bus stop to protect me from rain/wind/sun? Are there benches or will I have to stand while I wait?).

These questions take on a whole new meaning for those who depend on public transit to get where they need to go, like the grocery store or the doctor's office, and even more so when you have limitations that make poorly maintained infrastructure, like uneven and cracked sidewalks, a challenge.

Last year, a nationwide campaign called Week Without Driving began. The idea is to challenge our elected leaders and other leaders in the community to not use their personal vehicles for a week. After a successful first year, the event is coming back and is slated for the first full week of October to mark Disability Employment Month. Maybe they catch a ride from Uber or a friend, or maybe they have access to a bus stop, but the idea is to stand in someone else's shoes for a week. It'd be a good challenge for each of us too. How would you get to the grocery store? Or a doctor's appointment? Or maybe it's simply wanting to connect with others in your circle of family and friends. Taking the pledge puts you in a position to experience life if you couldn't drive a personal vehicle; you'd have plan out how you would do the many things you do each week without thinking if you used a personal vehicle.

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In 2020, Augusta Transit had many buses in their fleet that were 12 to 14 years old. The fleet had not been maintained with a proper rotation schedule, which is a reflection on the Augusta-Richmond County Commissioners, not Augusta Transit. Since that time, it has been successful with several competitive grants to replace the aging fleet with new, electric buses. Next year, Augusta Transit will receive five new electric buses, and this summer, it was

awarded another grant for the purchase of six more. If that weren't enough, Augusta Transit was awarded \$1.7 million to conceptualize and design its new transfer station in the downtown area. The turnaround for Augusta Transit won't happen overnight, but clearly it is on the right track. Considering that these grants must include a local match, the support from the current Augusta-Richmond County commission is also apparent.

The challenge for all of us today is to bring this success to Columbia and Aiken counties in South Carolina. Aiken County has taken steps forward with a recent survey and proposed routes, which includes adding necessary bus stops, but they've not gone far enough. In Columbia County, they have one stop that's serviced by Augusta Transit, but as you know if you've seen traffic along Washington Road and other nearby roads, public transportation could relieve some of that congestion.

The CSRA is already challenged by the car-centric planning of years past. Today, we need to push back against that and build the kind of interconnected transportation system that links people of all abilities through safe, reliable, and accessible transportation across the CSRA.

**Chris Hall**

Transportation Chair, Savannah River Group

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## Meet the Savannah River Group

Get involved with your local Savannah River Group! Plug in to one of our issue committees by contacting the leaders below. Not sure where to start? Reach out to our co-chairs and let them know what you're interested in!

Your new 2024 Executive Committee for the Savannah River Group is:

- Co-Chair: [Cathy Black](#)
- Co-Chair: [Greg Sutherland](#)
- Secretary: [Bridget Brown](#)
- Treasurer – [Moirra Nonnweiler](#)
- Georgia Chapter ExCom Delegate: [Jeffrey Holder](#)
- At-Large Member: [Ann Brown](#)



- At-Large Member: [Chris Hall](#)

The Savannah River Group's leaders also include:

- Conservation Chair: [Frank Carl](#)
- Fundraising Chair: Vacant
- Membership Chair: [Bill Jackson](#)
- Newsletter Editor: [Sam Booher](#)
- Outreach Coordinator: [Linda McBurney](#)
- Outings Chair: [Cathy Black](#)
- Political Chair: [Tim Nelken](#)
- Transportation Chair: [Chris Hall](#)
- Web Master: [Charlotte Gardner](#)
- Adopt-a-Stream Program Coordinators
  - Richmond County: [Frank Carl](#)
  - Columbia County: [Tim Nelken](#)

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Thanks for all you do to help protect the environment in the Augusta area, across Georgia, and beyond. Hope to see you at one of our upcoming meetings or events!

Website: <https://www.sierraclub.org/georgia/savannah-river>

Email: [SRGsierraclub@gmail.com](mailto:SRGsierraclub@gmail.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/savannahrivergroup>

Meetup: <https://www.meetup.com/Georgia-Sierra-Club-Savannah-River-Group-Augusta-GA/>

P.S. - If you ever need to contact the Savannah River Group by "snail mail," you can reach us at this address: Savannah River Group, Sierra Club, PO Box 14463, Augusta, GA 30919.