



**SIERRA CLUB**  
GEORGIA CHAPTER

**Savannah River Group**

**Some of you may have already received a copy of the Nov – Dec Newsletter and noticed some out-of-town events and information. Georgia Chapter generates the SRG newsletter based on our local input. And they got our info mixed with another Georgia local group and distributed an inaccurate newsletter for the SRG group. I’ve attempted to edit and localize our newsletter.**

**Bill Jackson, Savannah River Group Member Services**

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Dear Sierra Club and Savannah River Group Supporters,

The past few months have been very difficult for our Group and community. Hurricane Helene’s destruction has been shocking in its intensity throughout the CSRA. I know many of our members and supporters have been struggling with house damage and tree damage. I hope things will begin to return to normal by the end of the year. Now is a good time to start thinking about our community’s Urban Forest. We must plan and plant for the future.

We have had to cancel our October meeting because of damage to the Unitarian Church where we meet. However, we will start back with our regular meetings next week (see below for more info). As usual, we will not have a December meeting so that everyone can spend time with their families during the holiday season.

We have also had to cancel our October outings because of storm debris blocking the paths. Our hikes in the woods will take a while longer to begin again. However some local parks have started opening their trails

I hope we can continue to move forward in the healing of our community. Please stay safe.

**Cathy Black**

Co-Chair & Outings Chair  
Savannah River Group

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# Upcoming meetings

## Savannah River Group - November Monthly Meeting

**Tuesday, 19 November 2024, 6:30. Sustainability within our Community**

With a rapidly expanding population, how do we address the challenges that comes with that? And what does sustainability have to do with this? Join us to hear Chris Hall discuss elements of sustainability and how we can create this into a movement.

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/u/kb5RhncoMb>

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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, December 7, 10 AM - Euchee Creek Greenway Bike Ride:** (~8 miles) This trail is the latest addition to Columbia County's Greenway system. We will start our bike ride at the Trail Head on William Few Parkway right before the County's recycling center. We will bike to Columbia Road and up to Patriots Park and back. Depending on the debris clean up

and the group, we may be able to ride further. Helmets are required. Make sure your tires are in good shape and pumped up. [Learn more and register at this link.](#)

<https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=701Po00000TJIlIAH>

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## Upcoming events

**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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**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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## The Urban Forest

By Danny Burbage

*(The article below discusses the urban forest as the first article in a three-part series on sustainability.)*

Urban Forest and Community Forest are interchangeable terms and refer to the full complement of trees in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods. Even though both are apt descriptors, community forest better connotes the relationship between local trees and people. Urban and community trees are beautiful, to our eyes and to our souls. But they are also infrastructure. Just like water treatment plants, HVAC units, storm systems and the like, trees serve the public in very practical and useful ways. Trees help to prevent flooding. Thunderstorms, like the afternoon boomers that are more and more common these days, can overpower storm drain systems, but tree canopies mitigate the impact. As rain falls on a tree's crown, leaves slow down the

torrent's velocity and subsequent path to the ground and storm water drains. This dampening allows the built drainage system to move the water at a more manageable rate and not be overwhelmed to the point of flooding adjacent areas. Trees also assist in flood management by absorbing groundwater through their roots and utilizing it in their transpiration process. Depending on species, one mature tree can absorb between 10 and 150 gallons of water per day. An entire urban forest can absorb thousands of gallons in a day, acting much like a retention pond.

Trees are air filters. Their leaves act as holding cells for dust, allergens, pollutants, and other air borne particulates. While they are being incarcerated in this green jail, our breathable air is cleaner and healthier. Similarly, the community forest captures atmospheric carbon and holds it in its biomass. Forty-eight pounds per mature tree can be captured and stored annually. At the same time, our trees are manufacturing oxygen and releasing it into the atmosphere. And they are air conditioners. By creating shade and transpiring, a single tree can reduce air temperatures 7-15 degrees, welcome relief in our warming world.

Energy conservation is part of the green infrastructure as well. Appropriately placed trees can act as a windbreak to reduce chilling and resultant heating costs. Similarly, a deciduous tree can shade and cool during the summer but allow sunshine to warm our homes during the winter when leaves have fallen. And less electricity is needed for cooling when nearby trees reduce ambient temperatures.

Trees can be members of the Chamber of Commerce and stimulate local economies. Studies from Athens, Georgia and the University of Washington indicate that customers linger longer and spend more money when shops are adjacent to healthy, vibrant trees. Real estate markets benefit too. Properly placed trees can increase property values significantly. When corporations consider whether to locate in certain areas, they look for amenities that their staff may desire. Among them are parks, green spaces, and an opportunity to interact with nature,

As our towns and cities grow and expand, urban trees contribute to mental and emotional health as well as the myriad physical benefits. We pour more asphalt and concrete, erect more buildings, and we encroach into what has been bucolic wildlands. Preservation of some existing trees, coupled with wise planting and maintenance of new trees, can keep our communities at a human scale that is relatable, calming, and welcoming. Birds, pollinators, and other wildlife are welcomed rather than driven away forever. Community forests help to create and sustain a sense of place, wellbeing, and a statement of the character of the citizens who live there.

Hospital patients who have a view of trees or other green spaces heal faster and are discharged more quickly than others who don't. Other studies indicate that public housing complexes have less crime when there are ample trees and pleasant green spaces to view and congregate. People come out of their homes to enjoy the outdoor common space and, thus, keep watchful eyes on their surroundings.

A single tree or an entire forest can be inspirationally beautiful. As with people, that beauty increases when we learn about trees' inner workings and how they relate to the

world around them. We have learned that community forests are integral members of the systems that enrich our lives and makes them healthier.

*BIO*

*Danny Burbage is a native of the SC Lowcountry and a resident of Summerville. A Certified Arborist, Danny worked for 35 years as Urban Forester for the City of Charleston. Since retiring, he has become a member of The Town of Summerville Tree Protection Board and remains involved in community forestry.*

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## Conservation Update

### Protect the Okefenokee!

As we look ahead to what may be a challenging four years in our work to protect our communities and our environment. It's going to take all of us working together, with many small actions adding up to large movements.

In that spirit, I hope you'll take a few minutes today to help protect one of the most unique and ecologically diverse natural places in Georgia: The Okefenokee Swamp.

[We have a new opportunity to protect this treasured ecosystem for future generations.](#)

As the largest blackwater swamp in North America and one of the largest intact freshwater ecosystems in the world, the Okefenokee Swamp hosts hundreds of species of plants and animals, including multiple endangered and threatened species. It has significant historic, cultural, ecological, and economic importance, and it will play an important role in our fight to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is [proposing to expand the boundaries of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge](#) (NWR) by about 22,000 acres. The expansion includes land that is currently threatened by a proposed mining operation that independent experts say could cause irreversible damage to this delicate ecosystem. The FWS is also proposing a “fuel reduction zone” around the refuge to manage vegetation and reduce wildfire risks.

This expansion would help preserve key wildlife habitats, mitigate the impacts of wildfires and drought, and protect the swamp from mining threats. It will also safeguard an important and effective carbon sink as we continue to fight against the worst impacts of climate change.

**This expansion is a critical step toward long-term protection of the Okefenokee Swamp.**

You may remember that the wetlands surrounding the Okefenokee NWR were once under federal jurisdiction, but they lost those protections during the first Trump administration.

Adding these 22,000 acres to the National Wildlife Refuge will give them a high level of protection once again and make it harder for those protections to be ripped away.

**You can make a difference!** Tell the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that you support expanding the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

**The deadline for comments on this expansion proposal is November 18, so take action today!**

[Together, we can help save this incredible ecosystem.](#)

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## Appalachian Trail Thru Hike In Georgia

The Appalachian Trail stretches from Georgia to Maine along the ridges of the oldest mountain chain in the world. These mountains have been weathered for eons by rain, wind, snow, ice and glaciers. This I knew as fact, but it didn't serve to prepare me for my first experience on the AT, when Ludger and I through hiked from Amicalola Falls State Park to Neals Gap, completing sixty grueling miles in six days, five nights.

October 9, 2024, twelve days after Hurricane Helene ravaged Augusta and dumped thirty inches of rain in the mountains of western North Carolina (including that portion of the AT), we departed for Amicalola Falls SP on a spectacular fall day; clear skies, dry air, and mild temperatures. By noon, we were registered and on our way, each carrying forty pound packs including food and 2 liters of water. The approach trail to the southern terminus of the AT takes you up Springer Mountain to a granite overlook stretching out to the south. There, we pulled the plastic box out of the steel enclosure housed inside the rock on the peak to sign the registry of the AT hikers. We had completed our first summit, 7.3 miles of "rocks & roots" covered with leaves and storm debris, in five hours, and were poised to start our adventure on the AT in GA.

We learned some important AT lessons on day 1: the trail is composed of fist size rocks, exposed root systems, granite slabs & boulders, fallen trees, and sparingly marked by vertical white blazes painted on tree trunks at eye level that may resemble splotches of light gray lichen; also, the trail is rarely level, rather, it's steeply inclined either up or down as it follows the ridge of the Appalachian Mountains; semi level ground for camping & sleeping can be sparse; and water sources may not be where you need them or where they are marked. As such, our AT trek could be summarized as an endless quest for potable water while hiking up

and down hazardous terrain carrying an extra forty pounds and wondering if you will succumb to fatigue before dark. In short, it was fabulous.

These lessons served us well in the days to come. We learned to carry extra water in case the next source was dry, to make camp before dark, to be creative in hanging our bear bags (food plus anything with an odor), and that eight to ten miles on the AT in GA is a strenuous day of exercise. We had two separate bear encounters, one where a mother & cubs were sited at night by folks in a camp next to us, and the other was reported to us by a solo hiker heading down the trail we were going up. I'm sure we were spotted before we had a chance to see them, as it's their home we were passing through and we made plenty of noise as we stumbled up and down.

Will I do more through hiking on the AT? I hope so. It was a wonderful experience. Do I recommend it for others? That's a qualified yes; it was much harder than I expected and I'm an experienced backpacker. If you go, be over prepared! Get in shape and travel light including 3 liters of water (6.6 lbs). Oh, and remember to stop often and look around at the amazing natural world through which you slogging; it's much more rewarding than staring at the trail for a safe place for your next step, and the journey is so much more important than the destination.

Jeffrey Holder  
Chapter Delegate

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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 – [Moira 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!

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.