

# **December 2024 Newsletter**

Falls of the James Group



The eagle pair have returned this fall to nest near the Pony Pasture Rapids Park on the James River. The one on the right is the female; females are larger than males. Photo courtesy of Andrew Peacock.

# <u>Tuesday December 10, 2024 6:30 - 8:30 pm</u> FOJG Green Giant Awards Potluck Dinner

Join us on 12/10/24 at 6:30 pm in the Discovery Room at the Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220 for fellowship and celebrate FOJG's 2024 Green Giant Awardees. Please bring an appetizer, main dish, salad, side dish, and/or dessert. Label the name of your dish and indicate if it is gluten-free, vegetarian, or vegan.

You can bring your own wine or beer to share and give them to the bartender who will serve your drinks per Virginia ABC alcohol policies. No hard liquor. We will provide serving and eating utensils, plates and cups. Water and sodas will also be provided.

Please register here by midnight December 8th so we know how many supplies to bring. <u>Sierra Club Falls of the James Group: FOJG December Potluck Dinner and Green Giant Awards</u>

# **Green Giant Awards**

Green Giant awards go to members of the community who have made significant contributions in the area of environmental conservation. Each awardee receives a certificate and \$200.

# **Beth Kreydatus and Nicole Martin**



On the left is Beth Kreydatus and on the right is Nicole Martin. Photos courtesy of Beth and Nicole, respectively.

#### Dr. Beth Kreydatus

Dr. Beth Kreydatus teaches general education courses at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) with the Department of Focused Inquiry, and she serves as an education and outreach lead for VCU's Institute for Sustainable Energy and Environment. In addition to working with her students on service-learning projects related to sustainability, she has worked closely with several youth-led organizations. For example, she's worked with VCU's Green Action to advocate for a stronger sustainability plan for the campus, and since 2022, she has worked with GreenTeenz (as well as Henrico Conservation Action Network) to advocate for Henrico County to adopt a climate action plan.

Since 2019, Beth has worked closely with Concerned Citizens of Charles City County (C5) to advance environmental justice. In 2022, C5 successfully opposed the development of two massive gas plants in Charles City County, and they are currently building a green workforce program, Project BLACC. Finally, Beth currently serves as the environmental justice subcommittee chair for the Henrico chapter of the NAACP.

#### **Nicole Martin**

Nicole Martin currently serves as the President of the Chesterfield County NAACP. When she learned of Dominion Energy's plan to build a fossil fuel gas plant in a community that has already endured 80 years of coal ash pollutants, she immediately started her quest for environmental justice. Nicole has also played a key role in opposing the gas plant as Board Member of the Friends of Chesterfield.

Nicole has partnered with allied community groups opposing the gas plant including Mothers Out Front, Virginia Conservation Network, Virginia League of Conservation Voters, The Southern Environmental Law Center, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, The Sierra Club, The Appalachian Voices, Women of Endurance, Chesterfield Education Association, the EQUAT Organization, and Clean Virginia. She is a frequent speaker at community forums on environmental justice and the Chesterfield gas plant. She has been interviewed by numerous reporters covering news on the gas plant

As Chesterfield NAACP President Nicole is a respected leader in her community who stands up for equal rights and justice for all.

### **Denise and Steve Markoff and Gray Montrose**





On the left is Steve and Denise Markoff and on the right is Laura Thomas. Photos courtesy of Steve and Laura, respectively.

#### **Denise and Steve Markoff**

Denise and Steve have shared a love for each other and the environment for the almost nine years they have been together. They also have had a love of nature individually their entire lives. While both have been in the Richmond area for decades, they made Richmond's Southside their home together for the last six years.

They found a number of amazing organizations working in the area that shared their passion for the environment and social justice and jumped into volunteering with those groups to try to help their community and city be more sustainable and equitable. Steve and Denise watched and learned from some of the best and most committed environmental activists and conservationists, not just the best in Virginia, but arguably the best anywhere. When they took on leadership roles in the Swansboro West Civic Association as President and Treasurer, they looked to take what they learned and with the help of many others, are bringing positive change to their community. With the help of the Richmond Tree Stewards, Swansboro West received a grant from the Richmond Office of Sustainability to plant 100 trees in their neighborhood, which is halfway complete. They recently learned Swansboro West and Southside ReLeaf were awarded \$20,000 from the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to conduct a community visioning for a park at the Swansboro West community.

Denise and Steve prune street trees with the Richmond Tree Stewards, clear invasives with Southside ReLeaf, conduct monthly cleanups in Swansboro West, and attend countless city meetings to advocate for their community, Southside and for the health of our environment and ecosystems. They also make sure to have fun and rarely miss a happy hour event.

#### **Gray Montrose**

Gray has over a decade of professional background in land use and environmental law, cultural

heritage, energy development and resource protection. She currently applies her expertise to the diverse conservation work of the Capital Region Land Conservancy and is an active member of the Varina community.

Previously, Gray served as the Assistant Director with the Virginia Coastal Policy Center preparing Virginia communities for rising sea levels and new, increasing coastal hazards. She has also worked as a Virginia Assistant Attorney General working with agency clients in a variety of legal matters. Gray specialized in Clean Air Act law, land use and environmental protection, as well as guiding state agencies through significant regulatory and policy changes following major decisions such as Friends of Buckingham v. State Air Pollution Control Board, No. 19-1152 (4th Cir. 2020), which was the first time a court mandated consideration of environmental justice in permitting decisions. Gray also created the role of outreach contact for tribal leaders and worked to address matters of importance to Virginia's native peoples. Her background in easements and land use proved valuable as the department worked closely to manage conservation incentive programs for multiple state agencies, contributing to the stewardship and protection of millions of acres, natural, cultural, and historic resources.

In 2023, Gray was named the Greater Richmond Bar Foundation Volunteer of the Year for pro bono volunteer work and is a former Mental Health America Mental Health Champion for advocacy leading to reforms of the Virginia Bar Examiners' Character and Fitness examination. Last year, her farm won a Golden Hammer Award from the Historic Richmond Foundation for efforts to preserve the historic farmhouse. Gray is also a small farmer, currently participating in a land-use value program and heavily involved in local conservation efforts, as well as is an elected area representative on the local Farm Services Administration committee as a voice for small, beginning, and urban farmers.

## Laura Thomas



Laura Thomas joined the City of Richmond in October of 2022 and is the first to serve in the new role of Director of the Office of Sustainability. Laura works to continue to advance climate justice work in the community, as seen recently by City Council's adoption of RVAgreen 2050- the City's firstever Climate Equity Action Plan.

Laura received her B.S. in Biology from VCU and went on to achieve her M.S. in Sustainability from the University of Wisconsin. Prior to working with the City, Thomas worked in the private sector as a Chemist in the field of hazardous waste disposal, and then went on to serve the City of Largo, Florida as the Sustainability Administrator. In this role, Thomas led work to advance initiatives to build a more sustainable and resilient community for all. Her efforts focus on people-centered change management to ensure individuals thrive through sustainability and resilience change, including transitioning municipal fleets to allelectric, developing city-wide policies to advance climate justice, and developing the city's first equity-center, community-led planning process.

Thomas has served on the Urban Land Institute's International Health Equity Leaders Network, is a co-founder of the Pinellas

County FL Sustainability and Resilience Network, and was awarded the Sierra Club of Florida's Osprey Award which recognizes the statewide Local Government Employee of the Year. Photo of Laura Thomas is courtesy of the Richmond City Website.

# **Upcoming FOJG Programs**





Aileen Woll on the left. Photo courtesy of the Sierra Club Virginia website. Dan Crawford on the right. Photo courtesy of Dan Crawford.

1/14/25 7:00 - 8:30 pm FOJG Program - Wind Power in Virginia, Offshore and Onshore: Why Wind Power in Virginia? Where Do We Stand Now? What Could the Future Hold? Our speakers are Eileen Woll, Offshore Energy Program Director for Sierra Club of Virginia, and Dan Crawford, Chair of the Sierra Club Roanoke Group. Hear why they're so excited about wind power in Virginia! This is a hybrid event. Eileen Woll will be presenting in person while Dan Crawford will be presenting via Zoom. The presentation will be at the R F & P Forum room at the Science Museum of Virginia at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220. If you wish to join by Zoom, register here for the Zoom link and email reminders. Wind Power in Virginia, Offshore and Onshore

2/11/25 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm FOJG Program - University of Richmond Faculty and Student presentations on Data Centers RF & P Forum room at the Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220.

**3/11/25 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm FOJG Program - Solar Energy Policy and Updates with Dr. Damian Pitt from Virginia Commonwealth University** RF & P Forum room at the Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220.

**4/8/25 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm FOJG Program - Electrification and Smart Efficiency Improvements for Homeowners with Andrew Grigsby**, **Energy Services Director at Viridiant.** RF & P Forum room at the Science Museum of Virginia, at 2500 W. Broad St, Richmond, 23220. Viridiant is the Richmond-based nonprofit that has been providing technical support for more sustainable construction since 2006. The presentation will cover strategies to remove fossil fuel appliances from your home, minimize total energy use, and make the best use of all rebates and incentives.

Specific topics include details for heat pumps in Viriginia's climate (spoiler, today's advanced heat pumps handle our coldest winters no problem), the importance of well-sealed ductwork, air-sealing and insulation strategies, indoor air quality, water heating options, appliances, and solar. The guidance applies to existing homes, those you may be remodeling, and new construction. And we'll leave plenty of time for your specific questions.

If you are resident of Richmond City, click here to subscribe to the monthly RVAgreen 2050 newsletter <u>City of Richmond Office of Sustainability</u>

If you live in Henrico County, look here to sign up for Henrico's Environmental Action Resource Team's (H.E.A.R.T.) newsletter. <u>Henrico's Environmental Action Resource Team - Henrico</u> <u>County, Virginia</u>



# Sierra Club Advocacy

Coastal Redwood trees. Photo courtesy of the Sierra Club website.

### What is the National Sierra Club Doing About Old Growth Forests?

This is the first in a series about what the National Sierra Club is working on across the country. This content is from the Sierra Club website.

"Forest conservation is one of the Sierra Club's oldest legacy campaigns, dating back to early efforts to protect California's sequoias in the 1890's. We have succeeded in protecting forests across the country for more than a hundred years by delivering grassroots power and influencing our targets.

Forests play a crucial role in addressing climate change by acting as one of the most powerful carbon sinks on the planet. They absorb roughly 25% of the carbon dioxide that human activities release into the atmosphere each year. In the United States alone, 112 million acres of old-growth and mature forests, managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service, provide an invaluable resource for long-term carbon storage. These forests not only help slow climate change but also offer countless benefits, including clean air, water, and habitat for wildlife.

#### Victory!

Executive order launches process for protecting mature and old-growth forests on federal lands After years of grassroots advocacy to protect old-growth and mature forests, President Biden issued an executive order to start the process of creating federal safeguards. Thanks to this executive order, the U.S. Forest Service is now working on a draft policy that would amend every single land management plan in the National Forest System. If this policy is done well, it could be one of the most significant forest policies in decades, providing long overdue protections for our oldest forests – but the amendment still needs significant improvements before we reach that milestone.

Over the past few years, we have seen some incredible victories for forest conservation: The Sierra Club has secured a Northwest Forest Plan Amendment to protect millions of acres of oldgrowth and mature forests in western Washington, Oregon, and part of California; activist pressure ended 50-year timber contracts in Alaska's Tongass National Forest; we saw members of Congress advance legislative protections for some of the most treasured parts of their districts; and we passed the National Roadless Area Conservation Rule, preserving 54 million acres of roadless National Forest.

These designations are lasting legacies for the people who fought to achieve them -- from the general public who provided comments and insight, to the presidents who signed them into existence."

Read more about what researchers are doing to help forests from Sierra, the magazine of the Sierra Club! <u>Moving Slightly Southern Trees to New England Could Help Forests Survive</u> <u>Climate Change | Sierra Club</u>

Nancy Patterson sent in this related link about saving forests. What can we do to keep the boreal forest from being flushed away?

# **Upcoming Sierra Club Chapter and Group Elections**

Sierra Club Falls of the James Group members should watch out for an upcoming email from the Sierra Club for our chapter and group elections! Joe Brancoli, Chair, Aileen Rivera, and Lee Williams, current FOJG Executive Committee members, are running for another 2-year term. Additionally, Tavarris Spinks is running for a position on the FOJG Executive Committee.

# Sierra Club FOJG November Events





Top left is Battersea Villa, circa 1768. Right top photo includes John Zeugner, our tour guide on far right, talking about the history of Battersea and all the work to restore it. Bottom photo is our hiking group. Photos courtesy of Shavon Peacock.

#### Hike on the Lower Appomattox River and Tour of Battersea Villa in Petersburg on 11/10/24.

The Sierra Club Falls of the James Group (FOJG) had a beautiful fall hike along the Lower Appomattox Trail <u>https://folar-va.org/</u> in Petersburg and a tour of historic Battersea, the 1768 home of the first mayor of Petersburg, Colonel John Bannister.

<u>https://www.batterseafound.org/</u>Bannister was also a signer of the Articles of Confederation, and an integral player in the struggle for independence during the Revolutionary War. We ended our hike and tour with an outside lunch at Old Town's Alibi under an amazing mural by Richmond artist Matt Lively.

Thanks to Richard Taylor and John Zeugner, Battersea Foundation Board members, for allowing us to access Battersea and teaching us the history of the trail and the villa. Thanks to hiking leaders Glen Besa and Doug Couvilion, as well as to all the hikers who picked up trash and recyclables along the trail, leaving the trail looking cleaner than when we began!

#### Shavon Peacock, Sierra Club FOJG Outing Leader



Pictured (left to right): Kent Peterson, Linda Eramine, Cindy O'Leary, Rebecca Adams, Verna Yrure, Lidas Parise (and Frankie), and Doug Couvillion. Photo taken by Kate Kennedy.

### Hike at Larus Park on 11/29/24

On Friday, November 29, nine hikers (eight people and one dog) gathered at Lewis G. Larus Park for a 1.5-mile hike through the suburban forest. It was a sunny, cool fall morning, providing perfect weather to enjoy some time on the trails. The park offered a peaceful and quiet way to kick off the holiday season.

Doug Couvillion, Sierra Club FOJG Outing Leader



Pictured (left to right): Lisa Pecunia, Gretchen Yeager, Brenda Miller, Anni Sherman, and Doug Couvillion. Photo Courtesy of Doug Couvillion.

### Hike Along the Buttermilk / North Bank Loop on 11/30/24

On Saturday, November 30 five hikers completed the 7 mile Buttermilk Trail / North Bank loop in the heart of Richmond. It was a brisk, sunny fall day that felt more like winter but the Buttermilk Trail provided shelter from the morning breeze and the North Bank trail offered plenty of sunshine. Along the way, the group saw a Belted Kingfisher, Buffleheads, Mallards, Double Crested Cormorants, and two Black Bears (as we passed by Maymont).

Doug Couvillion, Sierra Club FOJG Outing Leader

# **Upcoming Sierra Club Event and Hike**

**12/8/24 1:30 pm Join C5 and Sierra Club for a Conversation about Data Centers** Cedar Grove Baptist Church, 5500 Adkins Rd, Providence Forge, VA 23140. Please join us for a luncheon and an opportunity to learn about data centers. What risks do these projects pose in our community? Case Studies of Data Center Projects will be presented for real life comparisons.

Since Virginia has more data centers than anywhere else in the world, we know that the potential harms can far outweigh the benefits. Some data centers require more than 300,000 gallons of water to operate. Most come with 50 or more on-site, tractor-trailer-sized diesel generators that release toxic chemicals on a consistent basis. One single data center can require the same amount of power as the city of Austin, Texas. Combine all of these factors, and you get a recipe for disaster if a data center is not developed in a responsible way. **Residents of Charles City County deserve all the information about data centers – including what the industry won't tell you – before the project is approved.** Register here <u>Join C5 and Sierra Club for a conversation about data centers</u>

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The Emancipation and Freedom Monument on Brown's Island. Photo courtesy of Ralph Grove.

**12/14/24 9:30 am - 12:30 pm Emancipation Monument, Buttermilk Trail, and Belle Isle Hike.** Meet at the monument on Brown Island, near the intersection of 5th St. and Tredegar St. On this hike, we'll view the Emancipation Monument on Brown Island, and then take a walk across the James River and back via the Buttermilk Trail and Belle Island. We'll walk through a variety of paths, with views of the city, the river, and woods. The hike will cover about 3.5 miles and will last 3 hours. This is a moderate hike that includes some rocky ground and a stairway descent of about 40 feet. Ralph Grove is the Outing Leader. Register here <u>Emancipation Monument, Buttermilk Trail, Belle Island Hike</u>

## Join our Sierra Club FOJG Meetup Group and Get Notifications of Upcoming Hikes

Sierra Club - Falls of the James Group | Meetup We now have 346 Meetup members.

Emancipation Monument, Buttermilk Trail, Belle Island Hike, Sat, Dec 14, 2024, 9:30 AM | Meetup

# **Other Environmental Events**

12/5/24 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm Explosive Nucelar Weapon Testing, An Introduction by The Union of Concerned Scientist Explosive nuclear weapons testing is unnecessary, risks accelerating a nuclear arms race, and contaminating the environment. The United States stopped such testing in 1992—resuming would provide additional fuel for the budding nuclear arms race, encouraging other countries to follow suit.

The Union of Concerned Scientist is hosting the next webinar in their Global Security Talks series on explosive <u>nuclear weapons testing</u>. Learn about the history of nuclear weapons testing, the public health implications of the nuclear weapons complex, and the potential geopolitical impacts of resuming these tests. Register here for this webinar. <u>Explosive</u> <u>Nuclear Weapons Testing, an Introduction</u>

12/5/24 5:00 pm The Role of Data, Spatial Tools and Policy in Designing Offshore Wind Projects to Create Biodiversity Positive Outcomes - The Nature Conservancy Webinar What does the term net-positive impact on biodiversity mean in an offshore wind context? Why does it matter? How will we know if we achieve it? Host Christopher McGuire, Director of TNC in Massachusetts' Ocean Program invites you to join us for a conversation about this topic.

We will hear from Tricia K. Jedele, Esq., Offshore Wind Policy Manager at TNC and Dr. Marta Ribera, a spatial ecologist with TNC's NA Science team about the role of data, mapping tools and policy in designing offshore wind projects to create biodiversity positive outcomes on the Atlantic Coast. Register here <u>Webinar Registration - Zoom</u>

**12/7/24 9:00 am - 12:00 pm Bellemeade Park Conserve and Create** 1800 Lynhaven Ave, Richmond, VA 23224-7734 Friends of Bellemeade Park welcomes you to Conserve and Create workdays in the park. They are scheduled for the first Saturday in March through December: 9 am to 12 pm. Come share your knowledge, abilities, and passion for enriching our beautiful outdoor treasure. PARKING INSTRUCTIONS:

Park in the parking lot, and when you are facing the building, you will see two signs. Follow the signs and walk up the short hill beside the dumpster. Walk along the ally way on your right as you are facing the building and join our volunteers at our bike shop. **Questions? Contact Mr. Bob at (804) 310-1080.** We look forward to seeing you!

12/7/24 9:00 am - 12:00 pm General Assembly Preview by the Virginia Conservation Network (VCN). Join hundreds of Virginians and learn what issues we expect to come up during the 2025 General Assembly session. This is your best chance to hear about anticipated environmental legislation from statewide environmental experts and meet other conservation advocates from your area on the same day! The Richmond preview will be hosted by the Virginia League of Conservation Voters & Mothers Out Front. You will receive the exact address of your Regional Watch Party in mid-November. Register here <u>General Assembly Preview | Virginia</u> Conservation Network on Glue Up

12/10/24 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm Tuckahoe Creek Park Birding Outing with Richmond Audubon Society (RAS). Meet fabulous Richmond birder Diane Jadlowski at the picnic tables at noon. This is a 1/3-mile boardwalk with very easy walking. Picnic tables and benches are available for resting. Parking is available on the street (please don't block driveways). The boardwalk is ADA accessible, so everyone can enjoy this nature experience. 12341 Ridgefield Parkway, Henrico, VA 23233 (https://henrico.us/rec/places/tuckahoe-creek-park/). Contact Diane at 702.308.1953 or at djadski@gmail.com for more information.

RAS trips are open to all, RAS membership is encouraged but not required, and unless the trip says otherwise, you don't need to sign up. Please feel free to stay for as long as you want. Attendees do not need to stay the entire time listed.

The field trip schedule is subject to change. Trips may be added, canceled, or modified. Please check the RAS calendar online at richmondaudubon.org for the most recent trip information. Register here <u>Tuckahoe Creek Park, Tue, Dec 10, 2024, 12:00 PM | Meetup</u>

12/11/24 11:00 am This Year in Virginia Webinar: Join the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) for a virtual year in review with Sarah Francisco, SELC Virginia Office Director. Learn about highlights of the essential work SELC has done in 2024 to protect Virginia's air, water, climate, land, wildlife, and the people who live here. We're eager to share updates with you. Register here Webinar Registration - Zoom

12/12/24 12:00 pm - 1:00 pm Richmond and Hampton Roads Solar 101 Online by Solar United Neighbors. Learn about solar energy and its benefits for your home, or small business. We'll take you through the technology, economics, financing and more. You'll also learn about the Richmond and Hampton Roads 2024 Solar Co-op. The program is free to join, and members are not obligated to buy solar panels. Register here Richmond and Hampton Roads Solar 101 · Solar United Neighbors

**12/19/24 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm Virtual Eco Book Club** with **League of Conservation Voters.** Join Climate Action as we start our virtual Eco Book Club back up! We will be meeting Thursday, December 19th to rejoin and check-in with everyone. In this meeting we will discuss what book we would like to read over the holiday, which we will discuss in our next Book Club meeting in January to kick off the new year! This is a low-pressure meeting and solely so we can all reconnect and choose what book we will kick off Book Club of 2025 with! Register here Eco Book Club Is Back! · Virginia League of Conservation Voters

### You can check out other local free virtual and inperson events at:

FOJG Calendar <u>Events/Calendar | Sierra Club</u> Virginia Chapter Sierra Club calendar here <u>Events Calendar | Sierra Club</u>

Check out more environmental events on our FOJG Facebook page thanks to FOJG member Daryl Downing's frequent sharing of environmental events! (<u>4) Sierra Club - Falls of the James |</u> <u>Facebook</u>

# Join the Sierra Club

If you are not a member and are interested in joining the oldest, largest grassroots environmental organization in the country, you can join for as little as \$15 here. <u>Join Today. Become a</u> <u>champion. (sierraclub.org)</u> Once you join the national Sierra Club, you are automatically a member of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Falls of the James Group Sierra Club.

If you just wish to donate to the Sierra Club FOJG, you can donate here <u>Donate to the Sierra</u> <u>Club</u>

Check here for other ways to donate Ways To Give | Sierra Club

Add your voice to the hundreds of thousands of Americans committed to leaving our children a living legacy — clean air, safe drinking water, and natural grandeur. From Yosemite National Park to the Grand Canyon, since 1892 the Sierra Club has been instrumental in preserving nature's most splendid wild places. Thank You!

Shavon Peacock Sierra Club Falls of the James Group Membership Engagement Committee Chair, Outings Leader, and Newsletter Editor

#### Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet

### **2024 Executive Committee Contacts**

**Joe Brancoli,** FOJG Executive Committee Chair/Leadership Chair: joebsierra@gmail.com

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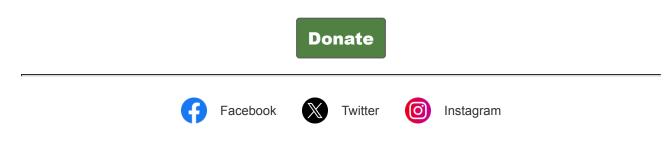
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