

# Old Dominion Sierran



Virginia Chapter Sierra Club

Winter 2012

www.virginia.sierraclub.org

## Why we can't stop uncontrollable consumption

### Unsustainable Me

by Suzanne Smith Sundburg

**T**oday's headlines—the continuing foreclosure tidal wave, unprecedented drought and wild fires, food banks collapsing under growing demand, record tornado and other storm-related damage, rising homelessness, and a precariously tottering Euro zone—all underscore the magnitude of the problems we face. So how do we, as Americans, respond to this backdrop of human tragedy and ecological disaster?

#### We Go Shopping!

Yes, we ignore the slow-motion catastrophe in progress and do what comes natural. We pepper-spray or trample anyone who thwarts our frenzy to buy the latest video games and gargantuan flat-screen TV for Christmas.

A new documentary, *Growthbusters: Hooked on Growth*, explains why. Daily messages—from the media, business and industry, and our government—bombard us with the notion that we can't be happy or prosperous without never-ending economic growth and consumption.

**Our filthy air, dirty water, cheek-by-jowl strip malls, and neglected infrastructure are no accident. These are the consequences of our addiction to building and buying stuff we can't afford and don't really need.**

Scientists' calculations, however, indicate that our current consumption rate already exceeds Earth's capacity to supply resources (think resource deficit). We've added over two billion people to this planet since 1985, and we're on target to add another one billion in the next 14 years. If everyone on Earth were to consume at our astronomical rate, we would need the equivalent of six planet Earths to provide enough natural resources.

#### Consumption's Hidden Costs

Most Americans admit that we cannot borrow and spend our way into prosperity. After all, America's 2010 trade deficit with China exceeded \$273 billion (higher than before the crash). And China—our biggest creditor and enabler—finances not just our purchase of Chinese goods but also our wars, which gives it lots of political leverage.

Recent studies show that developed nations' carbon-emission cuts since 1990 have been wiped out (several times over) by the increases in emissions from developing nations (like China) that manufacture the imported goods we buy.

Our filthy air, dirty water, cheek-by-jowl strip malls, and neglected infrastructure are no accident. These are the consequences of our addiction to building and buying stuff we can't afford and don't really need.

#### Americans Can Fight Back

In spite of government gridlock and corporate misconduct, we can take charge of our own destiny, help ourselves, and rebuild our communities:

- Reuse, reduce, and recycle at every level. It's not just a way to save the environment, it saves money, too.
- Shop locally. Supporting small, local businesses, manufacturers, and producers keeps your hard-earned money in the local economy. And by nurturing small businesses in your community, you maintain existing jobs and help create new ones.
- Move savings from the megabanksters to small, local community banks or credit unions. Main Street cannot wait for too-big-to-fail national banks or the government to unlock access to credit—we need to help one another now.
- Become more self-reliant. Plant a garden (or support your local farmers at farmer's markets or through buying clubs). Learn how to cook simple, delicious, and nutritious meals from scratch rather than purchasing expensive, unhealthy prepackaged foods.
- Get involved in local government, and speak up or ask questions when local officials make decisions that don't make sense or aren't in the best long-term interests of the community as a whole.



Remember, overconsumption, greed, and an indifference to how our actions and decisions affect the planet and those around us hasn't made us healthier or happier, and it certainly hasn't created a more stable economy.

The question is whether we'll continue blindly pursuing a failing economic model or we'll modify our thinking and behavior in order to build a sustainable system that is fairer, provides greater security, and makes protecting our home planet a priority. *Suzanne Smith Sundburg, a member of Virginia Chapter Sierra Club, is a writer.*

## From the Chair

Leaders set  
2012 goals  
to improve  
Virginia  
Chapter

by John Cruickshank

The Sierra Club is strong because of the important role volunteers play in leading the organization. This was clearly in evidence at the Virginia Chapter planning retreat on November 18 and 19 at a camp in the heart of the George Washington National Forest. Volunteer leaders teamed up with staff members to examine our "State of the Chapter" report and identify ways we can improve our effectiveness.

On the second day of the retreat we agreed on two goals for 2012:

- Improve chapter and group communications and collaboration to increase our power and influence in Virginia to advance our shared conservation outcomes.
- Increase the diversity of chapter and group membership and leadership and strengthen our alliances (people of color, labor, student groups, low income, clean energy businesses, etc.)

Our first goal is to empower each of the 13 groups in the Virginia Chapter as they work on local, state, and national environmental issues. The groups are the real "grass roots" of the Sierra Club and it is essential that they are active and strong. We believe the Virginia Chapter can work more effectively with increased mutual support.

The second goal focuses on expanding our membership base so it better reflects Virginia's diverse population. This, of course, includes recruiting more young people to the ranks. We are fortunate to have so many experienced activists who are fully prepared to educate the younger generation about vital environmental issues. The real challenge is finding the best strategies to engage these young people in our movement.

To achieve real progress in these areas we will need the support of volunteer leaders, staff members, and our entire membership. Virginia faces many serious environmental challenges in the years ahead and the role of the Sierra Club is critical. We must reach out to others and work effectively to protect community health and natural resources. Please contact me, jcruckshank4@gmail.com, if you would like to learn more about our goals or the "State of the Chapter" report.

## Planning retreat in GW National Forest



During a two-day retreat in November, leaders and staff of the Virginia Chapter listen intently to a presentation of goals for 2012. Photo by John Cruickshank

Virginia Chapter Sierra Club says goodbye  
to JR Tolbert, assistant director

We are sorry to report that Chapter Assistant Director JR Tolbert left the Sierra Club at the beginning of December to take a new position as executive director of the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators.

In his new position he will be working with environmentally minded state legislators from across the country to develop innovative environmental legislation and the strategies to get that legislation passed. Check out their website at: <http://www.nceel.net/>

## National Sierra Club election coming this spring

The annual election for Sierra Club's board of directors is now underway. Those eligible to vote in the national Sierra Club election will receive a ballot in the mail (or by Internet if you chose the electronic delivery option). This will include information on the candidates and where to find additional information on the club's website.

Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels. The club requires the regular flow of views on policy and priorities from its grassroots membership in order to function well. Yearly participation in elections at all club levels

is a major membership obligation.

The board of directors, which sets club policy and budgets at the national level and works closely with the executive director and staff to operate the club, is required to stand for election by the membership. Voting for candidates who express your views on how the club should grow and change is both a privilege and responsibility of membership.

To learn more about the candidates and their views on a variety of issues, visit the club's election website: <http://www.sierraclub.org/bod/2012election/default.aspx>



We are crying for a  
vision that all living  
things can share  
And Those Who  
Care are with us  
everywhere.

Kate Wolf



## Help Wanted

Virginia Chapter Sierra Club is seeking an assistant director for legislation and fund raising. Proven skills and accomplishments in both areas are a must. Knowledge of environmental issues and experience in working with volunteer leaders in a collaborative, decision-making process are also essential. Deadline for applications is January 9. Send cover letters and resumes to [dana\\_snead@sierraclub.org](mailto:dana_snead@sierraclub.org)

Old Dominion  
Sierran

## Winter 2012

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Our mission is to explore, enjoy and protect the wild places of the earth and to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.

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**Old Dominion Sierran** is published quarterly. The editor welcomes editorial contributions, photographs, news releases and art work. Submissions should be related to Virginia's environment. E-mail the editor with questions prior to submitting material.

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## Environmentalists must show strength and smarts

# 2012 legislative session may be toughest yet

by JR Tolbert

**W**e've all heard the story of David and Goliath. Goliath was a giant who many thought was unbeatable. David was a little guy with just a slingshot and a few rocks. What people didn't realize is when you have a slingshot and a few rocks all you have to do is hit the giant in the right spot and he'll fall.

The 2012 legislative session in Virginia is shaping up to be a David vs. Goliath battle of the ages. The good news is, the Sierra Club is David. The bad news is, we are facing two Goliaths this winter. Everyone knows about Virginia's largest utility, Dominion Virginia Power. Now this year they are being joined by Virginia Uranium, Inc. as the big bullies in the General Assembly.

Between these two companies they have 30 lobbyists and they spent more than \$750,000 in the 2011 election cycle. They both stand in the way of our efforts to clean Virginia's air and protect our waterways.

That's why the Virginia Sierra Club is going toe-to-toe with these two behemoths in 2012. We're fighting back against Virginia Uranium's push to lift a near 30-year

ban on the mining and milling of uranium in the Commonwealth.

We're doing it by bringing the power of people to Richmond. Throughout the General Assembly session we'll be hosting lobby days with our coalition partners, and bringing people from all over the Commonwealth to Richmond to call on their legislators to Keep the Ban.

We're not just playing defense, though. We're taking our fight right to Dominion. For too long, it has been allowed to stifle competition and limit consumer choice. Most recently, Dominion demanded that a start-up solar company based in Staunton not sell solar power to Washington and Lee University, from what will be the state's largest solar project right there on campus.

The Sierra Club has been working with the solar industry for the past several years, and we're going to take this opportunity to cement our relationship. Dominion should not have a monopoly on energy production in Virginia, and we're supporting legislation to stop its attacks on small solar companies.

We also think Dominion itself should

live up to its green advertising. Dominion collects tens of millions of dollars from its ratepayers every year as a bonus for meeting Virginia's voluntary renewable portfolio goals, and yet, contrary to its advertising claims, it has never sold a single electron of wind or solar energy in Virginia. Mostly they sell us "certificates" from old hydro-power, biomass and municipal waste facilities located elsewhere in the U.S.

We're tired of being chumps, and we think it's time for a change.

We've got a big agenda in 2012, but we can't do it without you. If you want to protect Virginia's drinking water from the dangers of uranium mining, fight in the clean energy revolution or advocate for more public transportation, we want you. You can get involved by joining the chapter's legislative committee. Just call the Virginia chapter office at 804-225-9113 to find out how.

*JR Tolbert is former assistant director for legislation and development of the Virginia Chapter.*

## Communicating with legislators during General Assembly session

**T**he best way to communicate with your legislator before he or she votes on a critical bill is by making a quick phone call before a critical vote. Three steps to communicating with your legislator during the General Assembly session:

- **Look up Your Legislators' Contact Information**

Find out who your legislator is and his/her contact information by visiting: <http://conview.state.va.us/whosmy.nsf/main?openform>

- **Track Legislation**

Want to get an email or call when critical legislation is coming up? Join Sierra Club's General Assembly Rapid Response Team and be one of the first people we call in your district to let you know of an important upcoming vote.

Email or call Mary Rafferty with your name, address, phone number and email address. [Mary.Rafferty@SierraClub.org](mailto:Mary.Rafferty@SierraClub.org) or (804) 225-9113.

You can also track legislation at <http://legis.virginia.gov/>

- **Contact Your Legislator**

The best way to communicate with your State Senator and Delegate during session is by calling their Richmond offices. Leave a message, including your name, contact information, the specific bill or issue you are calling about and how you would like them to vote. Legislative aides are fielding many calls so make sure you are concise and polite on the phone. Your phone call will make a difference.

## Let your legislator hear from you on Conservation Lobby Day January 23

**Y**ou can help create the change Virginia needs. Mark your calendar now for Conservation Lobby Day, January 23, 8:30 a.m.

Once again, Virginia Conservation Network will host the event at Richmond Center Stage.

Virginia's environmental advocates are working in support of "Keeping The Ban" on uranium mining in Virginia, Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts and attacks on smart growth laws.

Your lawmakers need to hear from you. Get the latest information on environmental legislation at Conservation Lobby Day, then share what you have learned with legislators face-to-face. The issues at hand are too important to leave in the hands of paid lobbyists.

But you don't have to wait to January to make a difference. Visit [www.vcnva.org](http://www.vcnva.org) and learn more about top environmental priorities and download your copy of the Virginia conservation briefing book, *Our Common Agenda*. Sign up to receive

Get the latest information on environmental legislation at Conservation Lobby Day, then share what you have learned with legislators face-to-face.

conservation news and action alerts. Our software makes it easy for you to contact your representatives in favor of sound environmental policy.

### Become a Sierra Club Citizen Lobbyist

The Virginia General Assembly begins in just over a month. Join our team of volunteers actively tracking and lobbying this year's environmental bills. You'll have the opportunity to advocate for more renewable energy in Virginia, keep the ban on uranium mining and ensure adequate funding for public transportation. No experience is necessary, only a passion for clean air and water. Email our Legislative Committee chair, Ivy Main, [ivymain@cox.net](mailto:ivymain@cox.net) to get involved today.

## Lobby Day for Virginia's Renewable Energy Businesses

**V**irginia's renewable energy businesses will gather en masse January 19 in Richmond to show legislators their power in numbers. This is the second year Sierra Club will sponsor this special Lobby Day, which will include more than 80 visits with legislators, a press conference and legislative reception.

These are the industries that represent our clean energy future. Yet their size and success is not well known among Virginia General Assembly Delegates and Senators. By having representatives of the clean energy industry all converge on Richmond on one day,

the Sierra Club provides them the opportunity to get the attention of legislators and garner some publicity for the clean energy industry.

Scores of lobbyists walk the halls of power in Richmond, many advocating for fossil fuels. These are the lobbyists that represent the status quo for the Commonwealth's energy portfolio - a status quo that supports only three percent of Virginia's energy from renewable sources. Our Lobby Day each year offers a chance to change that and we look forward to our continued work together in 2012 and beyond.

## Durban, South Africa

# Another UN Climate Conference—More Delays

by Glen Besa

The Sierra Club offers incredible life experiences to volunteers, whether it's hiking the Grand Canyon or the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, making a visit to Washington, D.C. to lobby congress, or traveling to Durban, South Africa to participate in the United Nation's Climate Conference.

Although as the Virginia Chapter director I am a Sierra Club staffer, I volunteer (at my own time and expense) to represent Sierra Club as part of our official observer delegation to these U.N. negotiations. Tyla Matteson, political chair for the Virginia Chapter, also volunteers to represent the club at the U.N. Climate Conference.

The United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change is unique in that every nation has a seat at the table and progress is made by consensus. As frustrating as this process can be, it does give each nation an equal voice in the process. This insures the most vulnerable countries, small islands and least developed countries are able make known their urgent concerns.

Although some policy makers in D.C. and Richmond may deny climate change exists and that human activity is the principal driver, people all over the world are suffering the consequences of global warming.



Activists wearing flags and logos of countries and corporations that refuse to act against climate change, demonstrate in Durban with their heads in the sand.

Photo by Josh Lopez

Sea level rise will soon eliminate many small island nations right off the world map. Severe flooding in Pakistan and Thailand this past year set records of people displaced. Extreme weather events in the United States caused record amounts of economic damage. Ocean acidification threatens the marine food chain that feeds

much of the world. At the same time, the climate scientists are warning more is to come unless we take bold action to reduce our carbon emissions.

As dire as the consequences of climate change are, we humans have an amazing resilience and capacity to get things done in a hurry. The only question is how much

destruction and loss of life and habitat will we experience before we wake up to the threat of global warming and get serious about emission reductions?

One thing the Sierra Club is doing about climate change is fighting Big Coal. In the U.S., working with local allies, we have stopped 159 coal plants from being built and we are now working with anti-coal activists around the world to share experiences, tactics and strategy in an emerging worldwide effort to keep coal in the ground. At conferences like the one in Durban, we have opportunities to meet with other activists around the world to build a powerful movement against coal and for action on climate change.

I'm not sure I would have ever traveled to Africa, but while making this trip, Tyla and I took advantage of the opportunity to see some of the incredible wildlife that exemplifies Africa, wildlife in jeopardy as the result of climate change. But most important, these conferences provide me with more information and motivation to fight for climate justice.

I hope to see you on the front lines.

## Uranium mining has devastating effects

# Fighting to Keep the Ban — a statewide, not just Southside, issue

by Mary Rafferty

I have spent much of the past 12 months traveling around the Commonwealth speaking with local Sierra Club groups about the potential for the nearly 30-year ban on uranium mining in Virginia being lifted as soon as January 2012.

As we enter into this critical General Assembly session, I want to remind you, this is a statewide (not Southside) issue. Every Sierra Club member from every corner of the Commonwealth, must ask his/her legislator to Keep the Ban.

### Let me start from the beginning.

A year ago, I received a call from Naomi Hodge-Muse, a Sierra Club member who lives in Martinsville. She had "just found out they are trying to mine for uranium about 25 miles from my house. I am concerned about this. Please come down to Martinsville and show me how to organize against it."

At that time, I didn't know much about uranium mining, just that it was proposed and it seemed like a bad idea. About a week later, on a cold evening in November, I drove the four hours from Richmond down to Martinsville.

Naomi had organized 10 people around a big table. We discussed the basics—write a letter to your legislator, talk to your neighbors, start a petition drive, etc.

A few days later, back in Richmond, I received an email from a local activist in Floyd. She knew I'd been to Martinsville and asked me to come talk to a group in Floyd about the dangers of uranium mining. A few days later, an email came from Chesapeake with the same request and a few weeks after that, a call from Fredericksburg.

I soon realized Naomi was not alone. There were groups of active citizens in Pittsylvania County, Danville and Halifax who had been fighting to keep uranium out of their region for over 30 years.

After a few trips to Southside I met dozens upon dozens of citizen activists. A farmer, who was concerned about his land, a real estate agent concerned about the future of property values, a retired doctor concerned about the health and safety of future generations. Mothers and fathers, business owners and retirees. They all had

the same message. "We don't want uranium mining in our community; can you help us get our message out to the rest of Virginia?"

### This is where you come in.

Uranium mining is a statewide issue and Southside citizens need your help to Keep the Ban.

While the industry would have you believe that Coles Hill in Pittsylvania County is the only site they are interested in mining, in the 1980s, uranium exploratory leases were acquired throughout Virginia. Leases spanned from Pittsylvania County to as far north as Fauquier, Culpeper, Madison and Orange County. While these leases have expired, if the ban is lifted statewide, these areas could be reconsidered for uranium exploration. Leases sat along the Occoquan and Rappahannock Rivers putting the drinking water for Fairfax County, Orange County and Fredericksburg City at risk of contamination.

Even if the ban were lifted for just Southside Virginia the statewide potential

remains. Lifting the ban in one area in the state is a slippery slope. As one geologist told the AP over the fall, "A common scenario in mineral exploration is that a large discovery such as Coles Hill is followed by an influx of exploration companies who comb the countryside and discover additional deposits"

Uranium mining has caused devastation in communities across the globe. It is a dirty and dangerous practice that leaves a legacy of toxic waste threatening drinking water and public health. As a Commonwealth, we must take this opportunity to look after ourselves by looking out for one another.

As we approach a vote, I encourage you to read the reports, share your concerns with your legislator and get involved. If we work to protect Southside Virginia from uranium mining now, we will protect all of Virginia for the future.

For more information about the campaign and information on how you can contact your legislator go to: [www.KeepTheBan.org](http://www.KeepTheBan.org) or contact Mary.Rafferty@SierraClub.org or (804) 225-9113 ext 112

## Dominion Power gets its way ignoring all who strive for clean sources of power

by Eileen Levandoski

Nobody likes a bully. And that's exactly what we have here in the Commonwealth with Dominion Virginia Power.

In 2011, a number of revelations came to light, prompting ramping up our work in 2012.

Thanks to both our legislators and utility regulators, Dominion pays an artificially low price for the coal they burn to make electricity—a price that doesn't reflect costs to our environment and health.

Thanks to the General Assembly, Dominion offers a voluntary renewable energy target that rewards them handsomely for

taking the lazy approach of buying out-of-state renewable energy credits from old hydro projects, many built pre-World War II, landfill gas, but from none that use wind or solar.

State regulators will likely approve Dominion's short-sighted 15-year generation plan, which lacks any serious plans for utility-scale wind or solar, but, at the same time, calls for a 25 percent increase in electricity generation to meet their forecasted demand.

Dominion squelched plans for increased solar panel installations on our Virginia homes and businesses by pushing

through SCC approval of standby charges that are both excessive and punitive.

Their monopolistic bullying also extended to Washington and Lee University where SecureFutures attempted to enter into a third-party agreement to sell the school solar-powered electricity. Dominion's response was a cease-and-desist letter, killing any hopes of penetrating their stranglehold on Virginia's electricity generation industry.

We need to stand up to this bully. And to do so, we need all hands on deck.

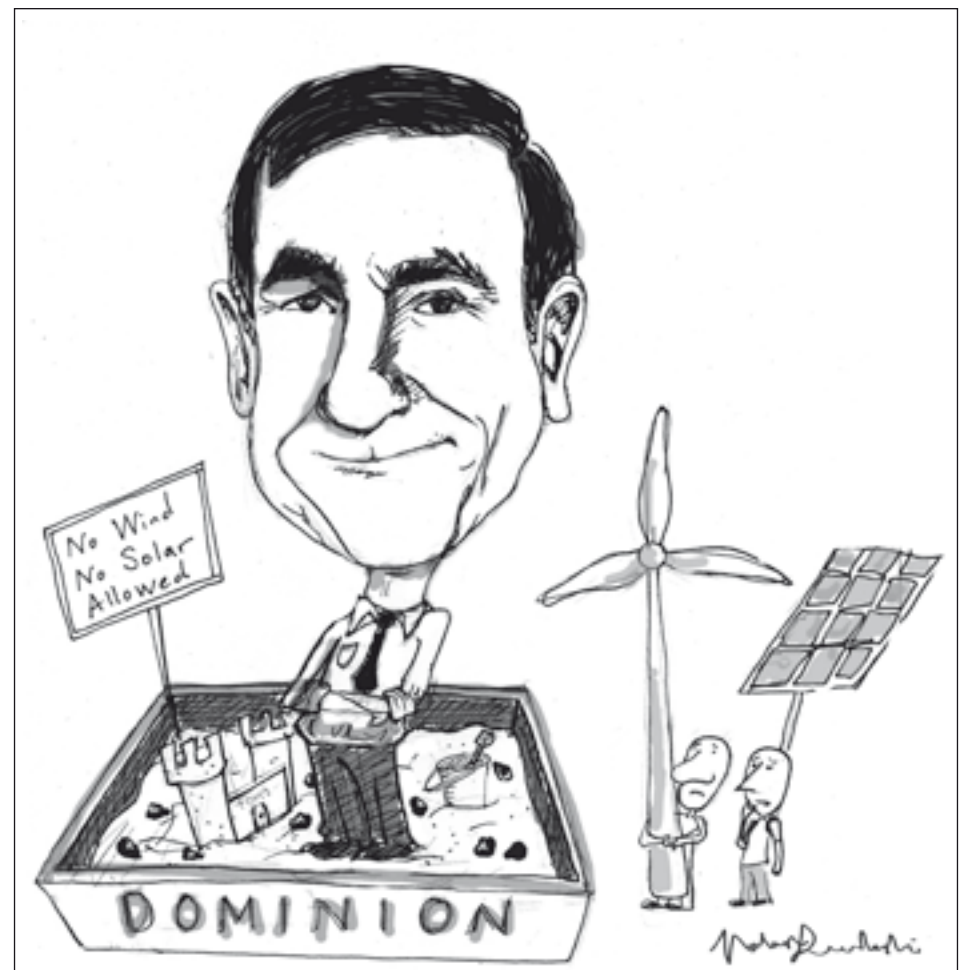
Join us during the General Assembly session in working to chisel away at the lock Dominion has on the legislative process and certain legislators.

Mark your calendars now for March 24 when (ala the Keystone pipeline demonstrators encircling the White House) we will encircle Dominion's headquarters in Richmond. It's a Power to the People moment and we must have you in Richmond that day. If you haven't done so already, be sure to join over 10,000 others who have signed our Dominion petition.

Visit [vasierraclub.org/cleanenergy](http://vasierraclub.org/cleanenergy) for more information.

Stay tuned for more information about Virginia's Solar Fund campaign that, un-

**We need to stand up to this bully. And to do so, we need all hands on deck.**



Cartoon by Natasha Levandoski

like Dominion's Green Power program, doesn't charge 50 percent overhead and is not zero Virginia-made green power.

Most importantly, check out our new Clean Energy Volunteer Central website at [vasierraclub.org/Volunteer.htm](http://vasierraclub.org/Volunteer.htm). The site is a resource for our volunteers working to build a Virginia Clean Energy Future.

There you will find sample and published letters to the editor, lists of big public events to canvass, links to our fact sheets, and much more. You're bound to be inspired and matched with the best volunteer job possible.

*Eileen Levandoski is Virginia Chapter conservation program manager.*

## Virginia Chapter Sierra Club releases Transportation Vision Report

by Roger Diedrich

On the eve of Governor McDonnell's Transportation Summit, and highlighting his flawed plan approved in the last General Assembly, the Virginia Chapter Sierra Club released its own transportation vision for Virginia. The report contrasts the policies and highway projects of the McDonnell Administration with a more responsible approach focused on public transit, better community planning and maintenance.

**Projects that can relieve congestion are those that will offer an alternative to automobile travel, and community redesign that would increase the feasibility of other modes of transportation.**

The Governor is going in the wrong direction by promoting investment in new, unneeded roads in every corner of Virginia, while local governments are desperate for support for community-based projects.

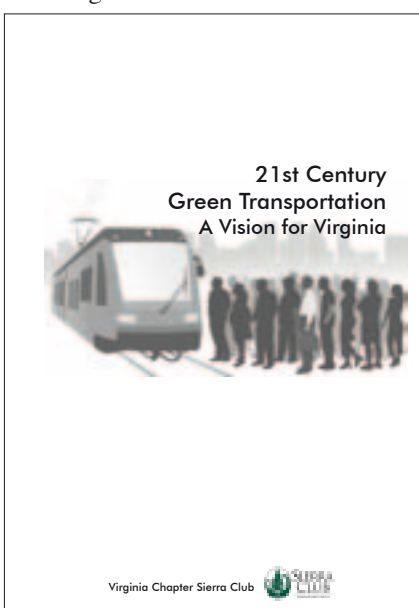
Projects that can relieve congestion are those that will offer an alternative to automobile travel, and community redesign that would increase the feasibility of other modes of transportation.

The McDonnell administration is seriously considering a move to "devolve" the responsibility to maintain secondary streets to counties, but without providing funding. Just as ridership is increasing wherever

public transit is available, there is a shortfall of funding for intercity rail operations.

The Virginia Department of Transportation held hearings at eight locations across the state in October, November and December. Sierrans spoke up at many of them, delivering a similar message about the urgent need for alternatives to highway spending. These voices were heard by VDOT and other officials, but past experience suggests they won't be heeded.

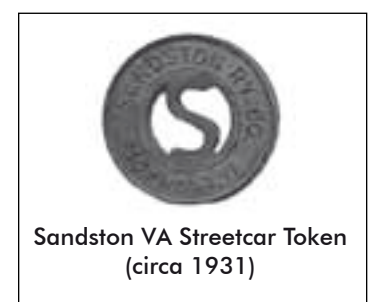
Some aspects of transportation policy will likely come up in the upcoming General Assembly. Sierra Club members are urged to follow our



process and let their legislators know how these policies affect their daily routine and community finances. In addition to the basic funding issues, legislators might try to continue a rollback of local planning authority and make changes to the Public-Private Transportation Act.

Our transportation vision report can be seen at the chapter website [www.virginia.sierraclub.org](http://www.virginia.sierraclub.org). For a hard copy, contact [dana.snead@sierra.club.org](mailto:dana.snead@sierra.club.org).

*Roger Diedrich is Virginia Chapter Smart Growth and Transportation chair.*



## Student design of solar homes grows, matures with each Solar Decathlon competition

by Tim Stevens

**T**wenty university teams designed and constructed efficient solar-powered homes exhibited in the 2011 Solar Decathlon on the mall in Washington DC this past summer. This could be the last time the Department of Energy's event will be held on the national mall.

The Decathlons have been personally rewarding for me, as a visitor and as a docent sharing highlights with some of the many visitors attending the nine-day event. Participating university students had the chance for role reversal – they taught us how our homes can be in harmony with the natural environment.

As a baby-boomer I've been struck by one significant difference between these participating student groups and many of my generation. The "back to the land" movement of the late 1960s and 1970s often reflected the desire to escape the urban jungle and the polluting grip of many contemporary technologies.

Solar Decathlon teams, however, embrace technology to demonstrate how creature comforts can coexist with maintaining our environment, even in crowded urban centers. Team New York designed a home meant for the unused space on top of New York City's skyscrapers.

The early Solar Decathlons—there have been five since 2002—focused on demonstrating how to derive energy from the sun, either photo voltaic or photo thermal. The



University of Maryland students designed and built this home that won first place in the Solar Decathlon competition.

houses were often little more than props for these systems. The teams in this year's Decathlon showed a marked level of maturity in demonstrating how PV and PT could be used to address a wide variety of cultural and environmental challenges, and in the process design houses pleasing to the eye.

Team Canada's house, designed for the culture of the Treaty Seven Native Peoples of Southern Alberta, addressed problems with fire and mold. The University of Illinois designed a house for disaster situations, such as tornados, where the tradi-

tional electricity grid is not available.

Two schools from the New York metropolitan area teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to design a highly efficient house meeting passive house standards that they donated to a low income family in Washington, D.C. These houses were typical of the creativity and sensitivity of the participants in this year's Decathlon.

Another example of "mainstreaming" could be seen in the house developed by the students of tiny Middlebury College in Vermont. Relying on materials and equip-

ment widely available on commercial markets, the liberal-arts students, who placed fourth overall, showed that not having schools of architecture and engineering was no longer a disadvantage. Their house incorporated features of a New England farmhouse, engendering inspiration and delight. I was especially impressed with their triple-paned windows with cork-insulated frames. The house is headed back to Vermont where a few lucky students will live in it during the school year and help educate the campus community on the benefits of sustainable net-zero energy living.

Special praise should be extended to the team from the University of Maryland. Their design focused on how a house can prevent storm water from polluting the Chesapeake Bay. Their team won first place this year. Also noteworthy was the team from Virginia, as Old Dominion and Hampton Universities teamed up to build a beautiful, highly efficient house intended for permanent placement in Hampton.

A teenager from one of my tours said it best, "these are the kind of houses I want to live in!" And many of us at the stage of life where we're considering downsizing and lowering the carbon footprint of our living space could benefit greatly by taking ideas and inspiration from these university students.

*Tim Stevens is treasurer of Virginia Chapter Sierra Club.*

## Solar energy revolution in Virginia thwarted by Dominion Virginia Power

by Ivy Main

**R**esidents of Virginia will be forgiven for not knowing a solar energy revolution is underway. Virginia lacks the incentives that have driven thousands of solar projects in neighboring states in recent years and made solar energy the fastest growing industry in the United States.

The price of solar panels has continued a steady downward trend. Considering cost alone, we could see the solar industry take off in Virginia within five years, even without state incentives. But for this to happen, Virginia has to remove the regulatory barriers that currently prevent solar companies from competing with aggressive legal monopolies like Dominion Virginia Power.

Dominion itself has not exactly embraced renewable energy. In spite of a lot of cheerful talk, currently the electricity it sells Virginia ratepayers includes no wind or solar energy at all. Worse, it has proven actively hostile to the efforts of others to create a solar industry here.

When the General Assembly passed a bill last year to increase the size of solar systems that could qualify for net metering from 10 kilowatts to 20 (about twice the size needed to supply all of an average home's electricity), Dominion insisted on a provision that would allow them to collect a "standby" charge to compensate for lost revenue. They promptly set rates so high as to make systems in this size range uneconomic. The SCC approved Dominion's rates over the protests of the solar industry and testimony showing that solar energy actually saves money by providing utilities with extra electricity during peak hours.

Even more egregious has been Dominion's attack on Secure Futures, a small solar company located in Staunton. Secure Futures recently completed the largest solar installation in the commonwealth at Washington and Lee University. Under the original terms, the company would own the solar panels and sell the electricity to Washington and Lee, an arrangement known as a third-party power purchase agreement,

or PPA. These third-party PPAs are highly successful in other states because they allow homeowners and companies to install solar panels with no upfront cost, overcoming the most common barrier to solar.

While the installation at Washington and Lee was underway, however, Dominion sent two "cease and desist" letters insisting that Secure Futures was violating Dominion's monopoly on electricity sales. Under the threat of protracted litigation, Secure Futures was forced to restructure its contract with the university to use a less desirable financing model.

Unless the General Assembly acts, Dominion will have succeeded in eliminating competition from independent solar companies in third party PPA financing—a loss for solar customers as well as for the small companies that have now been cut out of the most promising market for their product.

Destroying competition may, in fact, be Dominion's game plan. The company has announced it intends to begin leasing space on roofs for up to 30 megawatts of

solar capacity and will buy another three megawatts of solar energy from customers who choose to sell them the power rather than net-metering. After choking off competition from anyone else, Dominion may have ensured that anyone in its territory who wants solar power will have to deal with his friendly local monopolist.

Want to get involved in our campaign to bring more solar energy to Virginia? Join our solar team by contacting Phillip Ellis at [phillip.ellis@sierraclub.org](mailto:phillip.ellis@sierraclub.org).

**After choking off competition from anyone else, Dominion may have ensured that anyone in its territory who wants solar power will have to deal with his friendly local monopolist.**

## Successful solar homes require extensive planning to be totally sustainable

by Ivy Main

As the Solar Decathlon shows, solar homes are really about much more than solar panels on the roof. Designing a solar home means considering the total energy demand of the house, but often also its entire ecological footprint, including water use and the source of materials. Creating a truly sustainable society requires that we commit to a major shift in the way we design and build homes. Getting there may take decades, as the construction industry adjusts and new techniques and materials become standard.

But no one needs to wait decades. It is difficult, but not impossible, to build a sustainable house today at a cost competitive with ordinary custom construction (though not with tract housing). Carl McDaniel's *Trail Magic: Creating a Positive Energy Home* (Sigel Press, 2012) chronicles the building of one of the country's most successful solar homes, within the budget of two college professors. The McDaniels set out to build their retirement home in Oberlin, Ohio, but wanted it to be large enough to accommodate visiting family members and houseguests comfortably. Most of all, they wanted a house that would cut their carbon footprint dramatically and serve as a model for others to follow.

Achieving success required a dedicated team of architects, builder, and homeowners, rigorous attention to detail, and a



constant awareness of the bottom line. As with any building project, mistakes were made and lessons learned. Some features the McDaniels initially wanted had to be abandoned in the interest of economy, and a misunderstanding early in the process kept them from qualifying their home under the LEED standard even though they had enough points for a Platinum rating, the highest possible. McDaniel, a retired professor of biology, records his successes and failures with an equal spirit of enthusiasm and scientific rigor.

What makes *Trail Magic* more than just an entertaining read for the armchair environmentalist is that it includes a site plan, floor plans and cross sections, as well as practical discussions of building materials, from roofing to insulation. The author also reports more than a year's worth of energy data to demonstrate that the house really does produce more energy than it consumes. The last section consists of a detailed cost analysis, comparing actual construction costs with those of a comparable home lacking the sustainability features.

Cutting the carbon footprint of the nation's housing stock will be an enormous challenge, and will require more retrofitting of existing homes than construction of new ones. But for anyone who is planning on building a new house, *Trail Magic* should be required reading.

Ivy Main is Virginia Chapter vice chair.



The great room in the McDaniel's solar home has plenty of light and a small wood stove.

## Political Recap

### Vast amount of work leads to election day

by Tyla Matteson

A great deal of energy went into our political work for the November elections. The Virginia Chapter political committee, the chapter executive committee and many members worked hard reviewing questionnaires, participating in candidate interviews, joining political update conference calls, and working with the campaigns by canvassing, phone banking, and other activities.

A long list of staff and members put in volunteer time. To mention a few—Bob Pearson and Pat Soriano in Northern Virginia, Ellis James in Norfolk, Rudy Vietmeyer and others from the Roanoke Group, and many members of the Piedmont and Blue Ridge Groups.

I canvassed with Lee Rich in Newport News and Linda Cifelli in Williamsburg for Robin Abbott and John Miller. Glen Besa and I knocked on doors in Blacksburg with Rosemarie Sawdon for Don Langrehr and John Miller and later for Edd Houck in Charlottesville.

I enjoyed campaigning in Richmond with our favorite son, Chapter Water Quality Chair David Bernard, who took on entrenched Senator John Watkins, whose record on water quality is less than desirable.

The final results of our total endorsed candidates were 34 wins out of 53— a 64 percent success rate. A breakdown shows eight wins out of 12 endorsed for the State Senate and nine out of 21 wins for the House of Delegates. We endorsed 20 can-

didates in local elections across the state and of those, 17 were elected.

The State Senate will be split, 20 Republicans and 20 Democrats, with a Republican Lieutenant Governor to provide the tie breaker vote.

From fundraisers and donations, coordinated by JR Tolbert, former chapter assistant director, we were able to staff three people to work on priority Senate races. Vasilii Kisunko headed the work for Edd Houck, Anneli Berube for Bert Dodson, and Brenna Muller

for Dave Marsden, with Marsden the only winner of the three. Staffers engaged many Sierra Club members and others, notably a group of students from Virginia Commonwealth University, to help in these campaigns.

Some excellent House of Delegate candidates lost, including Robin Abbott of Newport News, Don Langrehr of Blacksburg, Connie Brennan of Nelson County, and several from Northern Virginia. New legislators we believe will be good advocates on environmental legislation are, in the Senate, Adam Ebbin and Barbara Favola, and in the House, Alfonso Lopez.

We truly appreciate the work of every member and friend on our priority campaigns. Now that elections are over, we need to contact the newly elected representatives, whether we supported them or not, and continue to build personal relationships. Important issues will be facing them in the General Assembly in January and they need to hear from us.

### What's in a Name? Energy Labels for Buildings

#### Net zero building

Offsets its energy consumption obtained from the traditional electricity grid with an equal amount of generation, usually from solar or wind energy.

#### Positive energy building

Generates more energy than it uses.

#### LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) buildings

Meet specifications set by the U.S. Green Building Council. Buildings are scored on a range of criteria, from energy and water use to site selection, indoor air quality, materials and design innovation.

#### Energy Star-qualified homes

Meet energy efficiency standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and are usually 20-30 percent more efficient than standard homes.

#### Passive House (from the German passivhaus)

Meets a voluntary standard for energy efficiency so rigorous that qualifying homes require very little additional heating or cooling.

## FEMA flood insurance program invites disaster

by David Bernard

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood insurance program's website, Floodsmart.gov, invites you to look at flood maps for all Virginia localities. However, you'll find no flood map available for dozens of counties and cities, including low-lying Norfolk and Mathews as well as for sites of catastrophic floods such as Buchanan, Rockbridge and Nelson Counties and Richmond.

Want to build by the coast or along a river? How about a subdivision on a bot-

tomland plain? Not to worry, the federal government will shoulder the flood risk for a small fee. High-risk areas have a one in four chance of a damaging flood over a 30-year period. The government subsidizes construction in these vulnerable locations by providing insurance that private companies are unwilling to sell.

FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) costs America four ways:

- Individuals and communities are encouraged to put personal safety and community viability at risk.

- Taxpayers outside the flood zone are liable for catastrophic losses.

- Flood-damaged buildings become pollutants or exhaust landfill capacity.

- Land close to waterways is richest in wildlife and habitat is lost when inappropriate development is subsidized.

Subsidies for risky waterfront and floodplain development are an improper use of both government and private resources. The NFIP is a federal program we would be better off without.

## Letter to the Editor

### High oil prices and transportation funding deficits

Dear Editor,

Wall Street and mutual fund oil commodity speculation, combined with royalty free oil extraction on public lands, is resulting in lost billions to taxpayers. It causes gasoline prices to be inflated as much as \$1.50 per gallon at the pump, making it more difficult for state and federal legislators to propose higher gasoline taxes to fund transportation infrastructure improvements.

The effect of oil commodity speculation on the price at the pump has been well documented this year.

Senator Bernie Sanders, I-VT, detailed significant evidence that the price of oil is 30 to 40 percent higher due to Wall Street oil commodity speculation.

Steven Pearlstein explained how mutual funds are escaping corporate profit taxes and Commodities Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) regulation by setting up Cayman Island shell companies for the sole purpose of commodities speculation.

ExxonMobil Chairman Rex Tillerson testified that excessive speculation may have increased oil prices by as much as 40 percent.

Goldman Sachs estimated excessive speculation at \$27 a barrel. Banks, mutual funds and shell companies do not use the oil they contract to buy.

The Energy Information Administration reports America imports more than 60 percent of its oil, roughly 12 million barrels a day. Speculation alone could be costing consumers well over \$100 billion annually. The Congressional Accountability Office (CAO) reports that U.S. taxpayers may be foregoing up to \$53 billion in revenues from oil companies that drill in the Gulf without paying market-rate royalties.

Basing oil extraction royalties on market rates and raising taxes on commodity speculation profits could have the dual effect of lowering speculation and gas prices while raising revenue for transportation and jobs investment.

Virginia has a long term deficit for road, bridges and rail funding, which adversely impacts both quality of life and commerce. All Virginia drivers, businesses, and transportation infrastructure could greatly benefit from lower gas prices while allowing a tax increase on gasoline to go towards Virginia's transportation infrastructure and jobs.

*Emile Derek Boyle  
Burke, VA*

## Winterizing the Home - Conserving Energy and Saving Money

### Change the Furnace Filter

Replace or clean furnace filters once a month during the heating season. Dirty filters restrict airflow and increase energy demand. Consider switching to a permanent filter to reduce waste and hassle. Disposable fiberglass filters trap 10 to 40 percent of debris. Electrostatic filters trap around 88 percent and better control the bacteria, mold, viruses and pollen that cause illness and irritation. However, they can cost \$50 to \$1,000.

### Run Fans in Reverse

Most people think fans only cool, but many ceiling units come with a switch that reverses the direction of the blades. Counterclockwise rotation produces cooling breezes while switching to clockwise makes it warmer -- air pooled near the ceiling is circulated back into the living space, cutting heating costs as much as 10 percent.

### Turn Down the Water Heater

While many conventional water heaters are set to 140° F by installers, most households don't need that much steam, and end up paying for it in dollars and the occasional scalding burn. Low-

ering the temperature to 120° F (or lower) could reduce water heating costs by six percent to 10 percent.

### Install Storm Doors and Windows

Installing a storm door can increase energy efficiency by 45 percent by sealing drafts and reducing air flow. Storm doors also offer greater flexibility for letting light and ventilation into your home.

Storm windows make a huge difference when a cold wind starts blowing. It is worth the trouble to get them out of the shed or attic and install them for the season.

### Mind That Thermostat

It's easy to forget to turn down the heat when you leave the building. Lowering the temperature is one of the surest ways to save money. Most households spend 50 to 70 percent of their energy budgets on heating and cooling.

Every degree you lower the thermostat during heating season will save between one and three percent of your heating bill. Make it easier with a programmable thermostat, widely available for as little as \$50. It will save the average family \$180 a year.

### Use Caulking and Weather-stripping

Simple leaks can sap home energy

efficiency by five to 30 percent a year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. It pays to seal up gaps with caulking and weather-stripping.

Take a close look at places where two different building materials meet, such as corners, around chimneys, where pipes or wires exit and along the foundation. Use the incense test. Carefully move a lit stick along walls (avoiding drapes and other flammables). Where the smoke wavers, air is sneaking in and heating or cooling is escaping.

Or have someone on the outside blow a hair dryer around each window while you hold a lighted candle inside. If the candle flickers or goes out, you need to caulk or weather strip around the frame.

### Boost Insulation

Insulation is one of the best ways to save energy and money at home. Add more insulation between walls and make sure the attic floor and basement ceiling are well covered and you'll see the difference.

### Insulate the Pipes

Pay less for hot water by insulating pipes, which also helps decrease the chance of pipes freezing. If the pipes are warm to the touch, they are good candidates for insulation. Use the same method to determine if the hot water heater would benefit from some insulation. Pre-slit pipe foam can be found at most hardware stores. Cut it to size and fasten in place with duct tape.

### Put on a Sweater

Roughly speaking, a light long-sleeved sweater is worth about two degrees in added warmth, while a heavy sweater adds about four degrees. Cozy up and start saving.





Photo by Whitney Byrd

## Southwest Virginia residents and environmentalists from around the state rally loudly in front of Environmental Protection Agency headquarters in Washington DC

by Hannah Morgan

More than 100 people rallied in front of Environmental Protection Agency headquarters (EPA) in Washington, D.C. on November 16 to send a clear message that mountaintop removal coal mining must end immediately, starting with the proposed Ison Rock Ridge permit in Virginia.

A&G Coal Corporation hopes to mine 1,300 acres above the communities of Andover, Appalachia and Inman. The mine would destroy miles of streams and fill nine valleys with more than 11 million cubic yards of rock and dirt. More than 8,000 comments were submitted to the EPA leading up to the rally to ask the agency to deny the permit.

Thirteen people came from directly impacted communities in Southwest Virginia. Many of them live at the base of Ison Rock Ridge or have family buried on the mountain. This was the first trip to D.C. for several of the residents and their first time working with Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS) and the Sierra Club.

Most of the 13 Southwest Virginia residents spoke at the rally, as did Phillip Ellis and Hannah Morgan, Sierra Club; Joelle Novey and Mike Little, Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light; Jason Von Kundra, George Mason University student group; Mike McCoy of Appalachian Voices, and Liz Judge from Earthjustice.

Joelle's all-woman social justice singing group performed several songs, a unique and powerful feature of the rally.

During the rally, the Greenpeace Organizing Semester group obtained over 50 photo petitions from participants who wanted to send their message to the EPA. These photos will soon be available at <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1405787167#!/pages/The-Southern-Appalachian-Mountain-Stewards/278619527583>

During the day, all participating groups (including CredoMobile) sent out action alerts urging people to send a message about Ison Rock Ridge to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, EPA Region 3

Administrator Shawn Garvin, Council on Environmental Quality, President Obama and Virginia Senators Jim Webb and Mark Warner. By the end of the day 3,500 messages had been sent to these targets from our supporters across the country.

The rally was a collaborative effort of the Sierra Club, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, Appalachian Voices, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, Greater Washington Interfaith Power and Light, George Mason University student group, Earthjustice and a number of committed people from across the state.

### Optimism of young environmentalist

## Future of environment seems in trouble -- but we can help

by Jonathan Knopf

Heading into 2012, it appears as if the political climate in Virginia could not be any more harrowing. This is especially true for those with any concern for the future of our environment, since the current outlook has likely induced nail-biting among many of us. Even a callow undergrad like myself, who voted for only the third time this November, realizes the importance of the coming battles ahead to ensure a clean and responsible Virginia.

Over the course of this fall I've had the tremendous pleasure of attempting to eliminate the need for any "battles" at all. In the month prior to the election, I witnessed true

grassroots campaigning at its finest here in the Richmond office of the Sierra Club. Volunteers of all types worked tirelessly by reaching out to Virginians across the state, gathering support for candidates who we knew understood the issues well.

When the dust finally settled, it was clear our job was far from done. Gains by Republicans in the House of Delegates and a controversial 20-20 "tie" in the Senate do not set the framework for environmentally-conscious legislative efforts. Added with a staunchly conservative executive team, there are plenty of reasons to remain apprehensive.

Regardless, I see this as an opportunity for Virginians to stand up for our rights to clean air and water. We know uranium mining in Pittsylvania County will threaten the health of many and open up the rest of the state to similarly dangerous practices under a tenuous guise of economic growth. We know our energy providers must invest in cleaner sources to limit the damaging impacts of coal and natural gas. Most importantly, we know the alternatives deserve little justification.

I remain optimistic about these efforts not only because I believe strongly in

them, but also because I am not alone. You would be hard-pressed to find any college student who doesn't support these principles; for most, such ideas befittingly reflect common sense.

Should you still get a cold sweat thinking about the 2012 General Assembly, take a deep breath and wipe it off. If finals have taught me anything, it's that action, not anguish, will help us reach our goals.

*Jonathan Knopf is a junior at Virginia Commonwealth University*

## Citizens hold "Rally for Renewables" presenting 2500 public comments to SCC



Activists chant outside the State Corporation Commission building while others inside submit 2500 public comments on Dominion's Integrated Resource Plan.

Photo by Whitney Byrd

by Kate Pollard

More than 50 citizens, activists and clean energy business owners from across the Commonwealth gathered on November 30 at Dominion's headquarters in Richmond for a "Rally for Renewables." We were there to demand Dominion Virginia Power and the State Corporation Commission (SCC) transition Virginia from dirty coal to clean energy.

Dominion's long-term energy plan, Integrated Resource Plan (IRP), must be approved by the SCC. Public comments were accepted through December 1. Currently, Dominion's IRP includes no major investments in renewable energy or energy efficiency programs.

Speakers Kate Pollard, Sierra Club's Virginia Beyond Coal to Clean Energy organizer, James Huff, CEO of Richmond-based Abakus Solar USA, Caroline Hansley, vice president of GreenUR, and Ivy Main, vice chair of the Virginia Sierra Club, urged the SCC to approve Dominion's proposal to retire the outdated Chesapeake and Yorktown coal-fired power

plants, and replace them with Virginia-made clean energy, including wind, solar and efficiency, rather than more fossil fuels. These two coal plants are responsible for 50 years of deteriorated health for area residents, contributing to 1,400 asthma attacks and 83 premature deaths annually.

Rally participants unfurled a 300-foot banner bearing 2,500 public comments on Dominion's long-term energy plan, and carried it, marching five blocks from Dominion's headquarters to the SCC building. A delegation of volunteers carried the banner of petitions inside to submit the comments, while ralliers outside chanted, "Fossil fuels, not the solution. We need a wind revolution."

The rally and comment delivery demonstrated broad public support for Dominion to lead the development of renewable energy in Virginia. Special thanks to all volunteers who contributed, and to Green Corps organizer, Patrick Stelmach for coordinating.

The SCC is expected to announce whether they will hold a public hearing on Dominion's IRP in early 2012.

### Casual hiker, rural living, or urban disaster

#### Wilderness First Aid

Learn how to save life and limb during the critical minutes or hours before an ambulance arrives, in a rural or wilderness area, or urban disaster zone. This course blends classroom and hands-on rescue scenario practice. Two-year WFA certification—also counts as re-certification for WFR.

Two-day class runs 8:30 a.m. to 6

p.m. each day. Fee \$175. For more information and registration, go to [www.solowfa.com](http://www.solowfa.com) or call 434-760-4453.

- January 7-8: Richmond, VA
- January 21-22: Norfolk, VA
- February 11-12: Charlottesville, VA
- February 25-26: Blacksburg, VA
- March 24-25: Northern Virginia
- April 28-29: Charlottesville, VA

## Falls of the James Group 30th annual holiday celebration great success



Adele MacLean, (l. to r.), co-chair of Falls of the James Group, Jane Schwarz and Robin Mann, president national Sierra Club, discuss some of the items listed in the silent auction during the annual holiday celebration. After meeting members and enjoying a healthy meal, Robin, special guest of the group, spoke on future plans and projects at the national level of Sierra Club. She explained how the club was planning strategic engagement of digital communications.

### Access to Electronic Group Newsletters

Several groups in the Virginia Chapter have switched from paper to electronic newsletters. This switch saves trees and frees up funds for use on local environmental campaigns. Some members, however, are not receiving their group's newsletters because Sierra Club has "turned off" their email addresses. If you do not receive your group's newsletters, you can rectify the situation by contacting Sierra Club's Membership Services staff at 415-977-5653 or [membership.services@sierraclub.org](mailto:membership.services@sierraclub.org).

### Mount Vernon Group Elections

Members of the Mount Vernon Group (residents of Arlington, Alexandria, Falls Church, eastern Fairfax County and eastern Prince William County) are eligible to vote in the annual election to select members of the group's executive committee. Ballots and voting instructions are available on the Mount Vernon Group web site <http://virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/>.

If you do not have access to the Internet or would like to receive a ballot by U.S. mail, contact Bruce Parker at 827 Fontaine St., Alexandria, VA 22302-3610, 703-549-5792, [bruce@chesdata.com](mailto:bruce@chesdata.com).

Voting deadline is December 31, 2011.

### Group Directory

Groups are organized to conduct the work of the Sierra Club in local areas, cities and towns. Groups in Virginia include:

**Blue Ridge:** Tom Eick

434-277-5491; [teick@ntelos.net](mailto:teick@ntelos.net)

**Chesapeake Bay:** Terra Pascarosa

757-291-4736; [terrabsp@gmail.com](mailto:terrabsp@gmail.com)

**Falls of the James:** Scott Burger

804-714-5444; [scottburger@mac.com](mailto:scottburger@mac.com)

Adele Maclean

804-282-8637; [amaclean94@gmail.com](mailto:amaclean94@gmail.com)

**Great Falls:** Chris Koerner

703-715-2204; [cekoerner@verizon.net](mailto:cekoerner@verizon.net)

**Mount Vernon:** Dean Amel

703-243-2095 [deanamel@comcast.net](mailto:deanamel@comcast.net)

**New River:** Maria Bowling

540-239-2583; [maria.bowling@gmail.com](mailto:maria.bowling@gmail.com)

**Piedmont:** Tom Olivier

434-831-2408; [cruz.olivier@gmail.com](mailto:cruz.olivier@gmail.com)

**Rappahannock:** Eric Lawrence Stott

540-429-0898.; [ericlawrencestott@gmail.com](mailto:ericlawrencestott@gmail.com).

**Roanoke:** Bill Modica

540-387-2782; [modicabill2@aol.com](mailto:modicabill2@aol.com)

**Shenandoah:** Ralph Grove

540-999-8734; [ralph.grove@gmail.com](mailto:ralph.grove@gmail.com)

**Sierra Club Potomac Region Outings**

(SCPRO): Michael Darzi, 301/580-9387; [Michael.Darzi@saic.com](mailto:Michael.Darzi@saic.com)

**Thunder Ridge:** In Reorganization

**York River:** Tyla Matteson, 804/275-6476

[tmatteson1@mindspring.com](mailto:tmatteson1@mindspring.com)

## Members discuss environmental issues, explore the outdoors, bounce to music, at early fall 2011 Annual Gathering

by Michael Darzi

For the second year in a row, the Annual Gathering was held at one of the historic cabin camps in Prince William Forest Park, a 19,000-acre oasis 37 miles south of our nation's capital. The camps were built during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Historic, rustic, and surrounded by nature, the camp was an ideal retreat for the Virginia Chapter to strategize, exercise, socialize, and have a barrel of fun for the weekend.

This year was no exception. There were sessions on the GenOn victory, protecting the George Washington Forest, planning a winning campaign, a transportation vision for Virginia, Dominion Power and the SCC, keeping the ban for uranium mining, biomass as a threat to Virginia's forests, and the 2011 elections.

Mary Ann Hitt, director of Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign, gave a stimulating

and encouraging keynote address about this highly successful campaign.

We took full advantage of the park's natural offerings by spending a lot of time outdoors. Activities included an evening stroll, a kick-ball game, a native plant walk, a five-mile hike, and an early morning bird walk.

Other exercise and outdoor related activities included a yoga class, a bicycle maintenance workshop, a presentation on new recreational venues in Virginia, outdoor leadership training, and a basic first-aid course.

The fun side was far from ignored. We enjoyed games, a sing-along, and the always-fun award presentations. Saturday night was capped with the dynamic and joyous music of the Skiffle band. Gathering participants did



Carol Ivory (r.) leads a walk to identify and discuss native plants and invasive species. Photo by Michael Darzi

not miss the opportunity to demonstrate their wide range of dancing skills.

Eating was another activity of pleasure, with catering by Sylvie Rowland of Laughing Duck Gardens who emphasized local, organic, healthy, and yummy foods.

## OUTINGS

by Joe Apple

### Outings leaders and programs across the state increasing

The status of outings around the Virginia Chapter is better than I thought. Occasionally when I get frustrated about the status of chapter outings, I say "Don't you want to see what you're trying to save?" Just ask members of the executive committee. Fortunately, my fellow committee members have learned I'm not as optimistic as I should be.

When John Cruickshank, chapter chair, surveyed the overall condition of the chapter, he found approximately 284 outings were held, most conducted by the Potomac Region Outings section. However, increased outings are being conducted throughout the state.

The chapter gained five new outings leaders through the Wilderness First Aid and Leadership Training program held during the Annual Gathering. One of the new leaders is the chapter chair. I hope he'll hold exciting executive committee outings in place of the boring committee meetings. LOL

I'm studying the practicality of installing hike announcements on the chapter webpage in an effort to increase the number of participants. I hope groups and individuals will send me their favorite hikes. I will provide the format to anyone who asks.

We plan to hold another outings training program complete with wilderness first aid during the 2012 Annual Gathering, which is currently being planned. If you are the least bit interested in becoming an outings leader, please take the outings leadership training portion of the course.

I will survey the chapter to determine the overall status of the outings program. In the meantime, please contact me if you have any ideas as to

- Why you feel it difficult to participate in an outings program or
- How the Virginia chapter outings program can be improved. I can be reached at [joe.apple@comcast.net](mailto:joe.apple@comcast.net).



**We took full advantage of the park's natural offerings by spending a lot of time outdoors.**

## Many ways to love the wild, open spaces

by Bob Egbert

Yesterday I did something I've been doing since I was 11. I went deer hunting. Long before I thought of myself as an environmentalist and before joining the Sierra Club, I was a hunter. For me there were three major holidays -- Halloween, Christmas and hunting season. My mother wrote notes to get me out of school for deer season.

My father and I didn't do baseball, football, cars, or any of the other male-bonding things fathers and sons do. We did hunting. Period. In hunting season we hunted and the rest of the year we talked about hunting and what we would do when the season arrived. My dad was 80 last time we went hunting together. He died seven years ago at 92 and the memories I keep are some of the best.



This doe was bagged with a Nikon on my walk to work. Photo by Bob Egbert

That probably puts me in a small minority within the Sierra Club. Most SC members don't hunt, some are strongly opposed to it. Unfortunately, this sets up an "us and them" divide between two interest groups that should be natural allies.

Hunters and others who might be conservatives often call themselves "conservationists." Non-hunters and liberals often call themselves "environmentalists." I see no major practical difference. It's true hunters and the Sierra Club often disagree on how much old growth forest and wolves there should be. But, we do agree there should always be wild, open spaces where everyone can enjoy nature. To me that's reason enough for a strong alliance.

Bob Egbert is a member of the Roanoke Group

# Not happy with your state senator? Run for office yourself

by David Bernard

**E**arly in 2011 four environmentalists visited State Senator John Watkins to speak with him about our concerns. The senator was dismissive of efforts to stop stormwater or agricultural runoff pollution. He insisted on proceeding with offshore oil drilling in Virginia and cited national security as a reason to open uranium mines.

The senator's arrogant, ignorant views led one of the four visitors to resolve to find a challenger for the senator's reelection.

We environmentalists wait to see if good candidates will come forward. When we think of the intelligence, considerate personality and viewpoints of our fellow Sierrans, we realize our organization contains a wealth of talent. How often do we imagine ourselves as that good candidate?

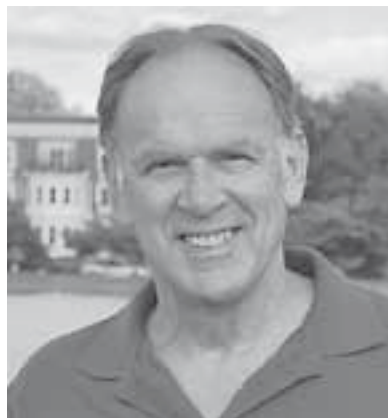
Running for office takes steady work and no small amount of money. But I decided it was up to me to do it.

## A few things learned about running for office

- Start early. Five months is not early enough. Two years might not be. Some complain political campaigns are too long. But to engage that voter, you need to have done the groundwork. Ask for money early on because the best time for fundraising is also the best time for campaigning. Go to neighborhood meetings and get to know the people whose support will be essential to your success.
- Don't back down. It won't win you any votes. We need leaders who acknowledge science and the limits of exploiting natural resources. All citizens' human rights and aspirations must be respected. Do not be afraid of any of the institutions, political or corporate, that loom over society. You joined Sierra Club because you have a vision of peace and prosperity. Share that.

## Running for office takes steady work and no small amount of money. But I decided it was up to me to do it.

Get involved at the local level with the Democratic Party. Sierra Club is non-partisan, but do you think you can engage those who deny climate change and the problem of fossil fuel dependence? Many Democrats are not aware of environmental issues, but they do know that those who make an unfair dollar at the expense of nature will not hesitate to



do the same at the expense of people. Working with other Democrats teaches about other issues. When you need help, the help you gave will be remembered.

When I began my campaign I had the mistaken belief a political campaign would be about debating the issues. It is not. The life of a politician is a life of asking. You ask for money, you ask for votes, you ask for publicity, you ask for people to volunteer time. No one is obligated to give you anything, and quite a few will not. You don't worry about that because you are too busy asking the next person.

I started last summer as an unknown, running against a 30-year incumbent. We did not raise a lot of money and we never did a mailing. But we talked to lots of people in the district.

We took 43 percent of the vote—67 percent in Richmond,

36 percent in Chesterfield, and 22 percent in Powhatan (Virginia's most Republican county.)

We're not happy Sen. Watkins has another four years. But we did as well or better than other Democrats who didn't face an incumbent and who had much more money. We were also helped by the incumbent's lazy campaign.

Most of the success is due to the Democratic professionals guiding me, the volunteers (including some Sierrans) who canvassed and spent hundreds of hours calling, the folks (many of them from Sierra Club) who made donations of \$10 to \$500 to help us get the word out to civic organizations like Sierra Club and Richmond Crusade for Voters, professional groups like the Chesterfield Education Association, who endorsed and supported me, and especially to the voters of the 10th District who showed up to vote for progress and a better world.

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