



THE MOUNT VERNON

SIERRAN

<http://virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg>

The Newsletter of the Mount Vernon Group of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club September/October 2004

Upcoming Events/Meetings/Actions

GROUP MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Mount Vernon Group membership meetings are held at the National Rural Electrical Cooperation Association (NRECA) building, 4301 Wilson Blvd., at the intersection of Wilson Blvd and North Taylor Street in Arlington. This is about a 5 minute walk from the Ballston Metro stop on North Fairfax Street. Meetings are always on the street level conference rooms in the building. The doors to the building are open. Free underground parking is available in the building. (Just take a parking ticket when you enter the garage, and when you leave, write "Sierra Club meeting" on back of the ticket and hand it to the attendant.) The meetings run from 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. with refreshments provided starting around 7:00 p.m. The meetings are open to the public at no charge, and reservations are not required to attend. Please bring a guest. For more information on these programs, contact Andrew Nicholls, Programs Chair, at 703/536-5047, aknicholls@cox.net.

September 14, 7:00 to 9:00 PM

TOPIC: What Did YOU Do in the Outdoors This Summer: An Interactive Program

Where did you go this spring and summer? What outdoor stories are you burning to share? Which photo tells it all? This will be an interactive, informal "round robin" where we all get to share, and we all get to learn. Bring photos, stories, souve-

Call for ExCom Candidates

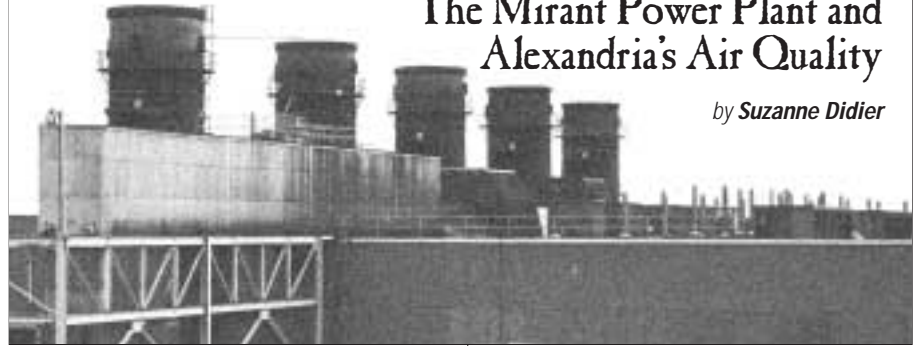
Do you want to become more involved in the Sierra Club? If so, consider joining the MVG Executive Committee! The ExCom works throughout the year to plan group social events, fundraisers, political activities and conservation campaigns. This year's elections will be held in November. If you're interested, please e-mail Pat Soriano, Chair, at patemail@verizon.net.

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Help, We're Choking!

The Mirant Power Plant and Alexandria's Air Quality

by *Suzanne Didier*



AIR QUALITY IN THE METRO D.C. area is a serious and growing concern, as most Mount Vernon Sierrans know. Each summer in recent years, for example, the region has experienced several days in which the ground-level ozone exceeded the EPA's health standard ("code orange" and above), and even healthy individuals were advised to limit their exercise.

This spring, the Sierra Club began a strategic campaign to stop one of Northern Virginia's major polluters and contributors to ozone formation – the Mirant electrical power plant along the Potomac River in Alexandria. In general, power plants and cars are the two major sources of nitrogen oxides (NOx), which can lead to ozone production. In 2003, the Mirant plant released 2,129 tons of nitrogen oxide, over 1,000 tons more than the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality allowed.

The 50-year-old Mirant coal-fired power plant is located near Old Town Alexandria, but supplies electricity to D.C. and Maryland. The plant sits in the middle of one of the most densely populated residential areas in Northern Virginia, a stone's throw from apartment towers and right along Alexandria's frequently used bike/jogging path

Besides contributing to ozone, the plant's emissions can cause other serious

health concerns. One of the greatest concerns with coal plant emissions is fine particles, which are linked to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. In Alexandria, *continued on page 6*

HYBRIDS: Separating the Hype from the Hope

by *Mary Kadera*

This fall, Ford will roll out the first mass-market hybrid SUV, a gas-electric version of the popular Escape. Hybrids—vehicles which combine gasoline engines with battery-powered electric motors—will become increasingly prevalent on American roads as automakers introduce a variety of new models over the next two years. What's involved in "going hybrid," and what are the benefits for Virginians who make the switch?

The Hybrid Boom

Toyota and Honda were the first two automakers to mass-produce hybrids, which appeared on the market in the late '90s. The public appetite for hybrids is admittedly

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The Mount Vernon Sierran welcomes articles, news releases, first-person experiences, poetry, photos and artwork. We reserve the right to edit all contributions for clarity, style, and length. Submissions are preferred in electronic format pasted into emails or as attachments. Photos can be scanned and emailed as JPEG files or mailed to the editor. Please contact Bill L'Hommedieu (703/527-4690) at 4013 North 18th Road, Arlington, VA 22207 or any Excom member for info. Views expressed by contributors are their own and may not necessarily be those of the Sierra Club. To place advertisements or classifieds in this newsletter, please contact Bill L'Hommedieu at 703/527-4690. The national Sierra Club web page can be found at: www.sierraclub.org. The Mount Vernon Group's web page is: http://virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg. The Mount Vernon Sierran is a publication of the Mount Vernon Group of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club in Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax, Falls Church, and Prince William County and is published 4 times a year for all Group members and the local public. Its primary mission is to inform and engage group members in activities for the protection and enjoyment of the local environment.

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Notes from The Chair

by Pat Soriano



IN OUR LAST ISSUE, I WROTE about how we were focusing our conservation efforts by locality—particularly in Alexandria and Fairfax County, given that Arlington is generally more environmentally progressive by comparison. Since so many of our Group leadership resides in Alexandria, we had gotten off to a good start in the city by meeting with other community activists led by Ginny Hines Parry of Alexandrians for Sensible Growth, <http://www.alex4sensiblegrowth.org/index.html>.

At the end of March, however, our Group learned of a critical issue in Alexandria when we were contacted by the North Old Town Civic Association (NOTICE) about a coal-fired power plant run by the Mirant Corporation in their neighborhood. As explained in the article in this issue, the plant has been in violation of the emission levels set by its operating permit. But because Mirant is bankrupt, it has chosen to get regulatory relief from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality rather than address the very serious air quality and health hazards for which it is responsible.

Join the MVG Group Announcement Listserv

Did you remember to attend the Mount Vernon Group Holiday Party and Silent Auction in December? Do you fail to schedule other Sierra Club functions that you really want to attend? If so, sign up for the new Group announcement listserv. You'll get automatic reminders of key upcoming events a few days before they take place. On occasion you'll also receive timely notices of breaking environmental issues and action opportunities. You will receive only one to four messages a month (we promise!), and your e-mail address will not be disclosed to others.

To subscribe, simply send an e-mail (with no subject line) to listserv@lists.sierraclub.org and put in as the message (without quotation marks) "subscribe virginia-mvg-news." You'll get a message back asking you to confirm your subscription request. Do so. You are then fully subscribed. If you want to unsubscribe at some future date, simply follow the same procedure but send the message "unsubscribe virginia-mvg-news". It's that simple.

Join the growing ranks of those local Sierra Club members who are taking more advantage of all the local Mount Vernon Group has to offer! ☺



Faith kayaking in Mason Neck (when she's not handing out brochures on Mirant at the King Street Metro Station).

Our Group Conservation Committee has quickly gotten energized around this issue, and no one has been more energized than Faith Teitelbaum, a member of our Group's Executive Committee. While most of us knew of the Mirant power plant, the email from NOTICE helped us to realize the need for action by our Group. Since then, we have attended several City hearings and met privately with City leaders to express our concerns, submitted comments to DEQ about the Mirant

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ADDRESS CHANGES

Member address changes: Sierra Club Member Services, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80328-2968. Send old and new addresses and a *Sierra* label; phone 415-977-5653; e-mail address.changes@sierraclub.org. For nonmember subscription inquiries and address changes: call 1-800-765-7904 toll-free or write to Sierra, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80328.

Important Contact Information

SIERRA CLUB HEADQUARTERS: 415-977-5500; Membership info: 415-977-5653; Sierra Club Legislative Hotline 202-675-2394; National Headquarters: 85 2nd Street, 2nd floor, San Francisco, CA 94105-3441; Sierra Club website:

www.sierraclub.org

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CONGRESSMAN MORAN'S OFFICE: 202-225-4376, email:

jimmoran@mail.house.gov; **THE WHITE HOUSE COMMENT LINE** 202-456-6213; FAX line 202-456-2461, email the President and Vice

President by going to www.whitehouse.gov and following the email prompts.



Local Government 101: How to Get Involved in Fairfax County

by Andrew Nicholls

Nearly 400 square miles in size, Fairfax County has a little over one million residents making it easily the most populous jurisdiction in Virginia. More than one in seven Virginians lives in the County.

Fairfax County's government is an elected Board of Supervisors consisting of nine members elected by district, plus a Chairman elected at large. Board members are elected for four-year terms. By law, districts must be of approximately equal population and each Supervisor (other than the Chairman) must be a resident and qualified voter of his or her district, and be elected only by voters living in that district. All voters in the County may vote for the Chairman.

The Board establishes County government policy, passes resolutions and ordinances approves the budget, sets tax rates, approves land use plans, and makes appointments. These actions are taken in open meetings.

How can you get involved and protect the quality of the air and water, if you live in Fairfax County? Here are six specific suggestions.

1. Know Your Supervisor. Politics is a people business. It may be a big county, but your supervisor only represents a little more than 100,000 people, many of whom choose not to vote, or cannot vote because they are in first grade. That means your "influence" is greater than it may appear. Become visible. Know who your supervisor is, make the opportunity to meet him/her at the local farmers' market. Establish personal rapport first before rolling out an agenda. (If you are not sure what district you are in, look at your voter registration card. It will indicate that under "local.")

2. Vote. Many Americans skip this fundamental right and fundamental duty. Don't be one of them. Although the next election for the Board of Supervisors is three years away, the November 2 ballot will feature a Park Bond Referendum of \$65 million to acquire new parkland, renovate existing facilities and develop new facilities on existing parkland. Previous bond referenda have financed the acquisition of nearly 6,000 acres of park and recreational facilities since 1998.¹

3. Get Informed. Fairfax County is blessed with an excellent annual publication, *Annual Report on the Environment*, which provides a summary overview of environmental issues facing the County. Go to <http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/dpz/eqac/report/> and read it!

¹ According to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/2004bond.htm>

4. Attend a Board Meeting. The Board meets an average of two Mondays per month beginning at 9 a.m. in the Board Auditorium of the county Government Center. The agendas are very specific, and are available online at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/>; click on "government". Generally, at 5:00 PM, there is a hearing on "public issues of concern" and this venue can be used to raise water, air and Metro/transportation issues. If you wish to testify before the Board, call the Office of the Clerk to the Board at 703-324-3151 be placed on the speakers list.

5. Be an Advisory Council Member. Fairfax County has more than fifty advisory boards, authorities and commissions, or in alphabatese, BACs. These bodies, staffed by volunteer citizens who are appointed by Supervisors, play an important part in advising the Board on a great range of topics. If you want to influence "from the inside" then securing an appointment to an environmentally-focused BAC is an effective strategy.

Some of the relevant bodies include the Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC), the Transportation Advisory Commission, the new Chesapeake Bay Preservation Ordinance Exception Review Committee, the Tree Commission, and the Park Authority Board.

A closer look at EQAC provides some sense of how these advisory groups work. What does EQAC do? It advises the Board on environmental matters, including include water and air quality, noise, hazardous materials, solid waste, stream valley protection, light pollution, and the preservation of ecological resources.

How does it do that? It provides advice through its *Annual Report on the Environment* (noted above under #2) and through resolutions and correspondence resulting from discussions at monthly meetings. Input from the public at such meetings is highly encouraged.

Who is on EQAC? The Council is comprised of one citizen representative from each of the nine Districts, appointed by the Supervisor of that district, four at-large members, and one student representative. This kind of configuration is fairly typical of Fairfax advisory groups.

How does one get appointed to EQAC? Ask George Lamb, an EQAC member, and a Sierra Club member who has held a number of positions both at the Group and Chapter levels. George was appointed to EQAC by his then Providence District supervisor, Gerry Connolly (who

is now the Chairman of the Board). Mr. Connolly didn't appoint George out of the proverbial blue; he knew George personally from George's involvement with Fairfax environmental issues and his work as our Group and Chapter political chair. In other words, see items #1 through #3 above.

6. Write. Too busy to attend hearings or serve on councils? Then write your Supervisor, either by electronic or regular mail, and tell them what you want them to do about Metro funding and air quality. They do not receive a huge volume of mail, unlike our Senators on Capitol Hill. They may listen; they certainly won't if you don't speak. ☺

Contact Andrew Nicholls at aknicholls@cox.net or 703/536-5047 if you have questions.

The True Cost of Food: How to Live in a More Sustainable Fashion

WHO: Mount Vernon Sierra Club Members and Guests

- Open to the public (non-members)
- Reservations not necessary

WHEN: Tuesday, October 12, 7:30 to 9:00

WHERE: 4301 Wilson Blvd, Arlington

- National Rural Electric Cooperative building at the corner of North Taylor St. and Wilson Blvd.
- Within 5 a minute walk of the Ballston Metro
- Free parking available under the building from North Taylor St.

WHAT: Discuss how our dietary lifestyles have significant impacts on land use, water quality and the diversity of life. Learn how to make more sustainable choices - *easily!*

- With less than 5% of the world's people, the U.S. consumes over 25% of its resources, and our dietary choices are a significant driver of that imbalance.
- But fortunately, what we eat is one of the things over which we have direct control.
- Sierra Club is initiating a "True Cost of Food" campaign to make the Club a leader in sustainable eating. Come and learn how to eat more sustainably by eating
 - lower on the food chain
 - organically produced food
 - locally grown food when practical.

At Long Last, a Boathouse for Arlington?

by Bruce Parker

FOR ALMOST A DECADE, the Mount Vernon Group has been involved in monitoring the efforts of rowing and paddling enthusiasts in Arlington to get direct recreational access to the Potomac River from the County. It has always been a point of frustration for many in Arlington that county citizens have had to go into the District of Columbia in order to get a canoe, kayak or rowing shell onto the Potomac. Because the George Washington Memorial Parkway hugs the Virginia side of the river the whole length of the county, it's particularly challenging to find a suitable spot for a boat storage facility in Arlington.

Early on, rowing supporters favored a shore-side location for the boathouse that was just upstream from Roosevelt Island. Although this is an ideal location from a water recreation standpoint, the idea of a large two-story building at this spot triggered expressions of concern from some environmentalists. In 1996 the Mount Vernon Group passed a resolution opposing construction of a boat storage facility at this point on the Virginia shoreline due to the Club's policy favoring the preservation of wild places in urban environments and the protection of natural areas for habitats.

In 2001 the Group reexamined its position at the request of Group members who were rowers, paddlers or simply supporters of broadening Virginians' ability to study the

river's ecology firsthand. At that time, the National Park Service had begun a feasibility study of four possible boathouse sites on the Virginia side of the river. One site was the originally proposed location, the Rosslyn shoreline near Roosevelt Island; another was between the 14th Street bridges (I-395). The Park Service also examined a site on Four Mile Run near where it flows into the Potomac; the fourth was on Daingerfield Island in Alexandria, which is already home to a sailing marina. During the course of the feasibility study, the Park Service dropped the Four Mile Run site from consideration and a new fourth site was added—the "upper" Rosslyn site. This upper site is a privately owned parcel near North Lynn Street. If a boat storage facility were built here, boaters would need to carry their canoes and kayaks across the Parkway via a new pedestrian bridge in order to reach the shoreline.

After a formal debate by the Mount Vernon Group's executive committee in 2001, that body decided to defer any further recommendations to the Park Service until the feasibility study was completed in August 2002. The study concluded that all four sites qualified as feasible locations for a boathouse. This study is available online at http://www.nps.gov/gwmp/boathouse/facility_study.htm. The first NPS newsletter on the study effort (June 2004) is available on line at <http://www.nps.gov/gwmp/boathouse/>.

The Park Service has now launched a full Environmental Impact Study (EIS) of an Arlington boathouse location. An initial public open house was held in the county on June 21. The public has been invited to participate in the EIS effort and provide comments on the suitability of each of the four sites for the proposed facility. The study will include a "no action" alternative—meaning that the Park Service could ultimately conclude that the existing and growing public demand for water-based recreation in Arlington and surrounding Virginia jurisdictions will have to remain unmet.

The Mount Vernon Group's executive committee will soon consider what comments to submit as part of the EIS study. They are likely to be consistent with the Group's public comments in the past. In February 2002, the Group did send in a letter to the Arlington County Board opposing a proposed high-density development of the upper Rosslyn site. It is important that this site remain available as the EIS process continues. A draft EIS is expected to be distributed for public review in the spring of 2005 with the final EIS being issued at the end of next year.

Group members with an interest in the recreational and environmental aspects of the Potomac River in the Nation's capital are encouraged to review the published feasibility study and provide their timely comments to the Park Service. ☺

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SALES AND LEASING

YES! I want to join the Sierra Club and help safeguard our nation's precious environmental heritage!

New member's name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ If this is a gift, giver's name _____

Membership category _____ Check enclosed Charge my VISA Mastercard

Exp. date ____/____/____ Cardholder name _____

Card number _____ Signature _____

Membership Categories Indiv Joint

Introductory	\$25	—
Regular	39	\$47
Supporting	75	100
Contributing	150	175
Life	1000	1250
Senior	24	32
Student	24	32
Limited	24	32

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Hybrid, *from page 1*

modest when compared to Americans' affinity for SUV's, yet demand has outpaced what the carmakers and many industry analysts had predicted.

Virginia is a big market for hybrids, second only to California in annual sales and showing 25% growth in the past year. Healthy U.S. sales, particularly in 2004 as gas prices escalated, prompted other automakers to

jump on the hybrid bandwagon: Ford's debut of the Escape hybrid will be followed closely by hybrid versions of the GMC Sierra and Chevy Silverado pickups. In 2005, Lexus, Saturn and Dodge will introduce hybrid SUV's, sedans, luxury cars and pickups, with Nissan following suit in 2006. In 2002, Toyota executives predicted that all their models would be converted to hybrids within ten years.

Hybrids cost more than their conventional counterparts: for example, a Ford Escape hybrid is priced about \$7,000 higher than the standard-model Escape, and the Civic hybrid comes in \$6,000 higher. However, hybrids can save consumers hundreds or even thousands of dollars in annual fuel costs, and in some states, additional benefits provide incentive for carbuyers to con-

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Fuel Economy: Driving the Talk

by *Andrew Nicholls*

One of the most important choices we make, environmentally, is simply how we choose to get from point A to point B. Walking and biking and rollerblading are, in a perfect world, the perfect choices, because no oil or coal is being burned to move us around. In an imperfect world, with time constraints, long distances, rain and snow, a galaxy of chores, an absence of Metro options, and often lousy pedestrian and bike infrastructure, non-fossil transportation options are often not practical. (Ask me how I know.)

Most of us drive cars and SUVs, and thus we consume oil in the process of getting to work, to the grocery, to pick up our kids. In the process, we contribute to this area's severe smog problem, we worsen the quality of the Chesapeake Bay, and we directly emit carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, doing our part for global climate change. We also, by our trips to the service station, increase the pressure to drill for oil in sensitive offshore areas, in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and other arctic areas, and oh by the way, increase our dependence on imported Persian Gulf oil. This is not exactly an enlightening list of virtues, is it?

If we must drive gasoline powered vehicles, one important question is, what kind of vehicle do we drive, and what kind of gas mileage does it get? This is an important question, because the choices available to us are now very extensive. We can choose to be conservative or liberal in our use of oil.

The table below provides a range of vehicle options available in the 2004 model year, from hybrids to Hummers. The miles-per-gallon

figures are from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency's Fuel Economy Guide for Model Year 2004 (available at www.fueleconomy.gov).

Barrels of gasoline required are based on two assumptions: 1) 12,000 total miles driven per year; 2) 40% of that is city, and 60% is highway driving. A Toyota Prius hybrid requires 5.2 barrels of gasoline per year. (A barrel is 42 gallons.) A Lincoln Navigator requires 18.6 barrels – more than three times as much. At \$2 a gallon, you would pay \$440 per year to drive that hybrid, and about \$1560 to drive the Navigator. Driving the Prius, you would emit about 0.6 tons, or 1200 pounds of carbon, per year; driving the Navigator, you would be responsible for over 2 tons. That is a very big difference, and over a decade of use, that difference is 14 tons of carbon.

The table contains some surprises. The new VW beetle may get better mileage than large SUVs, but its fuel economy is unimpressive for a "small" car, in part because it also a heavy car. The Chevy Impala, a large car, gets roughly comparable mileage.

Of course, the number of passengers per vehicle also matters. I commute on I-66 with my wife in a 1996 Saturn and we see large numbers of solo occupant hybrids. A solo occupant Prius hybrid is much better than solo-occupant other cars, but it isn't better than a Chevy Impala with four occupants, or a Lincoln Navigator with six, in terms of moving people per unit of energy. The point is that technology alone is not the sole answer; how we use the technology also matters. It's important to "buy efficient," but also to "drive efficient" through carpooling, planning out errands, and other measures.

Model	City MPG	Highway MPG	Barrels of Gasoline per Year	Cost per year (at \$2/gal)	Tons of Carbon
Toyota Prius Hybrid (A)	60	51	5.2	440	0.6
Honda Civic Hybrid (M)	46	51	5.8	490	0.7
Honda Civic (M-5) 1.7L	32	38	8.0	674	0.9
Pontiac Grand AM (A-4)	24	34	9.5	800	1.1
Toyota Camry (M-5)	24	33	9.7	816	1.1
Chevy Impala (A-4)	21	32	10.4	870	1.2
VW Beetle (A-4)	23	29	10.7	902	1.2
Ford Taurus (A-4)	20	27	11.8	992	1.3
Dodge Caravan Minivan	20	26	12.1	1,017	1.4
Ford Crown Victoria (A-4)	17	25	13.1	1,101	1.5
Dodge Ram 1500 Pickup (A-4)	15	21	15.4	1,290	1.7
Toyota Tundra Pickup 2WD (A-4)	16	20	15.5	1,304	1.7
Ford Explorer SUV 2WD (A-5)	15	20	15.9	1,333	1.8
Lincoln Navigator SUV 4WD	13	17	18.6	1,558	2.1
Hummer H2 SUV	8	10	31.1	2,609	3.5

Mirant Plant, *continued from page 1*

Mirant is the largest single source of fine particles. A study by Dr. Jonathan Levy of the Harvard School of Public Health estimated that each year the Mirant plant causes 59 premature deaths; 66 hospitalizations; and 4,600 asthma attacks. In addition to dangerous fine particles and ozone-producing NOx, the most recent annual data from the DEQ website says that the Mirant Plant released 241 tons of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming; 17, 627 tons of sulfur dioxide; which contributes to acid rain; and 72 pounds of mercury, which has been found to cause brain disorders in fetuses and children.

While scrubbers and other high quality pollution control technology can dramatically decrease the amount of toxic chemicals released, the Mirant Plant has not installed such technology to date, and at the DEQ hearing in April Mirant officials talked about trading "clean air credits" from its plants where emissions are lower to allow it to continue to pollute at the current level and still keep its permit. When Mirant exceeded the allowable amount of NOx in 2003, the plant received a Notice of Violation from the Virginia DEQ, but the plant has not been fined. The Atlanta-based Mirant Corporation which owns the Mirant plant has recently filed bankruptcy.

Over the past year, the Mount Vernon Group has focused on several projects relating to the region's air quality, and in early April 2004, the Group decided to increase its efforts on Mirant. MV Group Conserva-

tion Chair Ana Prados says that as she began looking at the issues, she was troubled by the stories of the residents of Marina Towers, across the street from the plant, who had found thick coal ash on their window sills and cars and who have reported developing coughs and asthma since moving to the Towers.

Since April, the Sierra Club has joined forces with other civic groups working on the issue, such as North Old Town Civic Association (NOTICe), Alexandrians for Sensible Growth and the League of Women Voters. Sierra Club members and others began calling and sending letters and emails to the City Council demanding action. On June 22, the Alexandria City Council passed a motion that proposes strong measures against the Mirant plant, including revoking the current use status of the facility, making it a 'nonconforming use,' which requires that the facility be terminated within seven years. The Council also voted that it may institute a Clean Air Act lawsuit, if appropriate, to seek imposition of penalties for Mirant's NOx permit violations, and will continue to gather data concerning the environmental and health effects of Mirant.

However, in a June 24 article in the *Washington Post*, Mirant officials said they expect that the City Council's actions will lead to a protracted process, and that in the end the plant will continue to operate. Mirant is currently trying to negotiate a consent agreement with the Virginia DEQ.

The Sierra Club plans to step up the pressure in the next months. In order to encourage more citizen involvement and awareness of Mirant and its dangers, Mount Vernon Group

members plan to hold a rally in October. Volunteers will be handing out brochures announcing the rally at metro stations, coffee houses, super markets and libraries, as well as at a table at the Alexandria Birthday Party festival in Old Town. The brochures contain sample letters to City Council members, the mayor and Virginia Attorney General Kilgore. Additionally, on July 29 Sierra Club members organized a meeting to assemble the diverse civic groups working on this issue. The attendees discussed ways to work together in the future, including possible fundraising activities to fund a modeling study on the environmental and health impacts of Mirant, and opportunities to pass out brochures together.

For more information about the rally and how you can help the fight against Mirant, please contact Ana Prados, ana_prados@yahoo.com or Suzanne Didier, suzleone@aol.com.

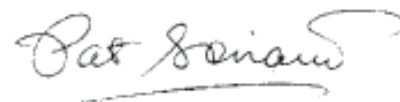
Notes from the Chair, *from page 2*

permit, met with other concerned Alexandria activists, and developed a brochure to hand-out to the public in order to bring greater public attention to this issue.

While we are still active with other air quality and transportation issues, including improved local funding for Metro and HOT lanes on local interstates, Mirant has been our main focus over the summer. While many of us have worked hard on this issue, no one has worked harder than Faith. So often issues are brought to our attention, but so rarely are issues both recognized and taken up by a single individual with the energy and leadership Faith has brought to the issue over the past few months.

Unfortunately, Faith is leaving Alexandria, hopefully for only a year or so. However, Faith led by example, and she is leaving us with the campaign matrix that she helped devise by faithfully (no pun intended) bringing it to all our meetings for continuous updating and consideration.

Thanks, Faith, for your tremendous energy, dedication, and friendship! We'll miss you and hope you return to Alexandria soon — maybe to an Alexandria with a park along the Potomac on the north side of Old Town....



Seth Eaton

REAL ESTATE AGENT

Environmentally Conscious through:

- Low Emissions Vehicle Use
- Solids Recycling
- Promotion of Public Transportation
- Active Sierra Club Membership
- Home Energy Consulting



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Hybrid, *from page 5*

sider a hybrid. In Virginia, a hybrid purchase often involves a deposit, generally on the order of \$1000, which gets you on a waiting list. The wait for a hybrid can be anywhere from six months to over a year. If you decide against the car while you're on the waiting list or after your maiden voyage in the car, your deposit is often refundable once the dealer secures another buyer for the car—though the exact arrangements vary from dealer to dealer.

Benefits in Virginia

You may be green with envy when you see a hybrid owner cruising down the HOV lane or bragging about the great tax deduction he got, but don't assume these benefits will convey to the newer hybrid models or be available over the life of your new car.

In Virginia, hybrid owners get a one-time tax deduction if their car qualifies as a "clean fuel" vehicle. It's the General Assembly, not VDOT, who decides which cars will be eligible for consideration: currently, the list is limited to the Toyota Prius, and Honda's Insight and Civic hybrid. As new models roll out, it's unclear which, if any, will qualify for "Clean Fuel" designation. Virginia's tax deduction is 10% of the federal deduction amount: in 2004, that's \$150 you can claim on your state tax form. (Maryland's state tax program covering hybrids ended this summer.)

The Clean Fuel designation and license tag are also required if you want to reap the other benefit dear to hybrid-owning Northern Virginians: the ability to utilize the HOV lanes, even with just a single person in the car. To date, Virginia and Hawaii are the only states to offer this benefit. States like Minnesota and Connecticut have explored or are rolling out other incentive programs, such as exemptions on sales tax for hybrid purchases.

That's the good news. The bad news is that due to a conflict with federal law, the HOV incentive is set to expire in 2006, so commuters may not enjoy a hybrid-shortened drive time for much longer. Also, both federal and state tax incentives for hybrid owners end in 2006. If you purchased in 2003, you would have been able to claim a \$2,000 deduction on your federal taxes and \$200 for state. If you buy a hybrid before December 2004, you'll get \$1,500 federal and \$150 state tax credits; in 2005, it's \$1,000 and \$100 respectively, and in 2006, the final year of the program, you'll

realize only \$500 and \$50 federal and state deductions.

At the same time the Feds phase out the tax incentives for hybrid buyers, the incentive enabling self-employed taxpayers to purchase large SUV's continues to grow. This federal tax credit covers vehicles weighing over 6,000 pounds and was originally proposed in the mid-'80s to enable small business owners to purchase trucks and vans. In 2001, the Bush administration proposed increasing the available deduction to \$100,000 per small business, a dramatic increase from the original amount of \$17,500. That same year, approximately 100,000 self-employed citizens claimed this benefit in order to purchase 3.6 million SUV's. Critics of the plan argue that smaller vehicles, including available hybrid models, are sufficient to meet the needs of many small business owners and should be covered under federal law as well.

Of course, many buyers are motivated by the environmental benefits hybrids offer. The Toyota Prius, for example, is 70% cleaner than the average new car model for smog-forming NOx tailpipe emissions. The Civic hybrid has about 50% cleaner emissions than the average new car for greenhouse gases.

The arrival on the scene of the new, larger-model hybrids is viewed by many environmentalists as a mixed blessing. Buying a large, 25 mpg SUV hybrid instead of its 12 mpg conventional predecessor feels like a step in the right direction to many, who view it as incentive for all automakers to raise their average fuel efficiency standards and who argue that buyers of large-model cars are not likely to make the switch to smaller vehicles, carpooling, pedestrian travel or mass transit. Nevertheless, others worry that the availability of new hybrids whose fuel efficiency is still lower than many smaller model conventional cars will detract from Americans' interest in lighter vehicles, ridesharing and investment in public transportation.

For more about hybrid vehicles and fuel efficiency, please see "Fuel Economy: Driving the Talk" in this issue of the newsletter. To learn more about the national Sierra Club's position on hybrid vehicles, check out the Sierra Club's "I Will Evolve" campaign, online at <http://iwillevolve.org/>. ©

Making Metro Work: Addressing Metro's Funding Crisis *by Chris Carney*

FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR, Metro riders are facing rising fares and potential service cut-backs. Many riders feel that we should blame WMATA for the budget problems, having read stories of mismanagement and theft by parking lot attendants. It's important to know however, that even with the best oversight and none of the recent scandals, Metro would still need 1.5 billion dollars to repair and maintain aging stations and tunnels, and purchase new rail cars and buses vital to reducing delays and overcrowding.

Deficits by Design

In its report "Deficits by Design," the Brookings Institute documented Metro's unique funding difficulties: unlike most other major transit systems, Metro operates without a dedicated stream of revenue. Metro instead depends on annual subsidies from the federal government and its local jurisdictions – and in tight fiscal times, this can leave Metro in dire circumstances.

Metro's facilities are aging and need maintenance: in July, a 20-by-20 foot section of ceiling fell in the Farragut North Metro Station, the system's third busiest station. Regular riders are all too familiar with overcrowding and delays, and Metro projects that without new rail cars, overcrowding will increase to unsafe levels in the coming years.

For the short term, the Sierra Club is calling on public officials in the region, including Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams, Fairfax County Supervisor Gerry Connolly, Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille, and Arlington County Board Chair Barbara Favola, to increase funding for Metro. The immediate goal is to secure the public funding to meet the \$1.5 billion capital budget shortfall. Long term, we need to establish a dedicated source of revenue so that Metro won't ride the fiscal roller coaster of local budget allocations.

Metro Riders Day of Action

In July, local Sierra Club volunteers took matters into their own hands to increase up the pressure on local elected officials to address Metro's funding needs. Sierra Club volunteers organized information events at fourteen Metrorail stations in Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Volunteers handed out flyers and urged Metro riders to call on their elected officials to increase funding for Metro.

"Metro riders are doing their part by paying higher fares," said Jenna Musselman, Sierra Club volunteer and daily Metro passenger. "Now it's time for our elected officials to do their part and commit to funding Metro." Fares from Metro riders cover a much higher percentage of operating costs than transit fares cover in any other major U.S. metropolitan area.

We All Need Metro

Local Sierra Club members are well acquainted with the benefits that Metro provides to our communi-

continued on page 8

Meetings, continued from page 1

nirs—anything that helps to illustrate your vacation/outdoor experience! Please send a brief note to Andrew at aknicholls@cox.net or Pat at patemail@verizon.net to “register” for this program.

October 12, 7:30 to 9:00 PM

TOPIC: The True Cost of Food: How to Live in a More Sustainable Fashion

With less than 5% of the world's people, the U.S. consumes over 25% of its resources, and our dietary choices are a significant driver of that imbalance. Fortunately, what we eat is one of the things over which we have direct control. Sierra Club is initiating a “True Cost of Food” campaign to make the Club a leader in sustainable eating. Come and learn how to eat more sustainably by making simple changes in your diet and grocery shopping.

GROUP COMMITTEE MEETINGS

EXECUTIVE (EXCOM) MEETINGS

Join the Group's elected leadership at these meetings where we direct and plan Group actions and activities. All Mount Vernon Group members are welcome to attend. For more information, including meeting location and agenda, and to RSVP, please contact Pat Soriano, Chair, at 703/671-3129 or by email at patemail@verizon.net. *Dates of upcoming scheduled meetings are:* September 22, 6:30 – 9:00 pm

CONSERVATION MEETINGS

The MVG Conservation Committee meets the third Thursday of every month (except December). Meetings are held at the Common Grounds Coffee House on Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, a few blocks from the Clarendon Metro station. For more information, including meeting agenda information and to RSVP, please contact Ana Prados,

Conservation Chair, at ana_prados@yahoo.com.

Dates of upcoming scheduled meetings are:

September 16, 7:00-8:30 pm, October 21, 7:00-8:30 pm, November 18, 7:00-8:30 pm

NEWSLETTER LABELING PARTY

Location: Home of Andrew and Leslie Nicholls in Falls Church near Seven Corners.

Join us for good pizza from The Italian Café and over 5000 labels. If you have the evening free, this is your opportunity for some easy volunteering on behalf of the group while also enjoying some friendly discussions on wide-ranging topics with your fellow members. For more information, contact Andrew Nicholls, Newsletter Labeling Coordinator, at 703/536-5047, aknicholls@cox.net. *Dates of upcoming labeling parties are:* October 21, 6:30 – 9:00 pm

GROUP SOCIAL EVENTS

THE METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON REGIONAL OUTINGS PROGRAM (MWRP) at <http://mwrop.org/index.html> provides a wide range

**Another World Is Happening!
See It at GREEN FESTIVALS 2004
Washington DC- Sept. 18 and 19**

Tired of trying to find ecologically sound products in the local supermarket? Wondering how you can make sure that the lumber used to remodel that kitchen or bathroom is not old growth wood? Interested in changing the world by investing in an alternative economy? ☺ THE GREEN FESTIVAL, opening at the Washington Convention Center September 18 and 19th, is where you will find the answers to these and many other questions. A not-for-profit project, produced jointly by Global Exchange and Co-op America, THE GREEN FESTIVAL will be open Saturday from 10 am till 9 pm and Sunday from 11 am to 7 pm.

www.greenfestivals.com

of mostly day hikes in our area led by experienced hike leaders. Instead of these traditional hikes, the Mount Vernon Group Sierra Club offers various alternative outings and social events as follows. For information on any additional offerings, please see our website at <http://virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/>.

Metro, continued from page 7

ties. For many in our region, it's the only way to get to and from our jobs and homes. Even if you don't ride Metro, you benefit by reduced traffic congestion and improved air quality as fewer people take to the roads for their commute. The boost to our local businesses can't be overstated – one only need look at the Orange Line corridor in Arlington for a snapshot of how Metro has benefited the Capital Region's economy.

Vision For Area Transportation Needs!

As our nation's capital, the metropolitan Washington area deserves a world class transit system. Rather than facing budget crises and being forced to raise fares and cut service, Metro should be the focus of major investment for both upkeep and expansion. We should be building the Purple Line, the name for a circumferential rail line linking the existing spokes of the Metrorail system with job centers and communities and a crossing at the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

Many of our regional officials are always ready to seek funding for highway projects. They found \$2.7 billion for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, \$800 million for the Springfield Interchange, and in Maryland are proposing \$3 billion for the Intercounty Connector (including financing costs). The Sierra Club asks: why can't they find the money when it's needed to fix and improve Metro?

What Can You Do?

One good action everyone can take is making sure your public officials know that funding Metro should be one of our region's highest priorities. You can also write letters to the editor on Metro funding. For more information, contact Chris Carney, conservation organizer with Metro DC Challenge to Sprawl Campaign, at 703 312-0533 or chris.carney@sierraclub.org. You can also visit www.sierraclub.org/dc/sprawl. ☺

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