



THE MOUNT VERNON

SIERRA

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

FEBRUARY
The Chesapeake Bay:
Dangerously
Out of Balance
MARCH
The Northern Virginia
Conservation Trust:
A Decade of Success

The Newsletter of the Mount Vernon Group of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club January/ February/March 2005

Energy Choices for Virginians

by Andrew Nicholls

Question: I currently buy my electric power from Dominion Electric Power. Could I buy it from another company?

Yes. In 1999, The Virginia Electric Utility Restructuring Act, SB 1269, passed the General Assembly and was signed into law by the Governor. Highlights of the bill include: deregulation of power generation by January 1, 2002; phase-in of consumer choice between January 1, 2002 and January 1, 2004; and rates capped through July 2007 for those who remain with the incumbent utility, which for us in northern Virginia is Dominion Electric Power.¹ Simply put, instead of buying energy from your local utility, as competition develops, you have the opportunity to make choices about who supplies your electricity.

Question: What alternatives exist?

According to the Virginia State Corporation's website, we do not currently have a large number of alternative "service providers" in electricity² (<http://www.vaenergychoice.org/suppliers/suppliers.asp>). But we do have some options. For example, residential con-

¹ This information is provided by the Energy Information Administration at http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneal/electricity/chg_str/restructure.pdf

² <http://www.vaenergychoice.org/suppliers/suppliers.asp>

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Make 2005 the year you do

One Thing

Now more than ever the environment needs you.

Global warming. Highway widening. Transit funding. Alternative energy sources. Clean air and water. Conservation of wild places.

You can make a difference. Writing a letter, attending a public hearing, or calling your elected officials are just a few of the ways you can volunteer your time and your help.

With more than 5,200 Mount Vernon Group members, each person's "one thing" can add up to a lot.

Look for the "one thing" symbol in the newsletter and on our Web site throughout the year for more ideas on how you can get involved.

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

I-66 Congestion: Is Widening the Answer?

by Mary Kadera

Beginning last July, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) embarked on a study of the I-66 corridor between Washington, D.C. and the Beltway. This study examines how to ease congestion on I-66 westbound and its parallel local roads; ensure access to, and the improved economic vitality of, regional activity centers; and ensure emergency evacua-

tion routes for Washington D.C. residents and workers.

I-66 was constructed in 1982 after years of vehement public opposition from Arlington County residents who didn't want a large interstate bisecting the county. As a consequence of the controversy, I-66 was approved as a four-lane, limited access roadway with the median reserved for Metrorail. Additionally, heavy-duty trucks were prohibited on I-66 and during rush hour, traffic in the peak direction was designated HOV-4. Collectively, these provisions became known as the "Coleman Decision"

after William T. Coleman, who was U.S.

In 1999, the feds overturned the specific requirements of the Coleman Decision, except for the ban on heavy trucks. The 6.5-mile stretch of I-66 between the Beltway and Washington, D.C. is now treated just like any other interstate in Virginia under federal law.

As part of its study, titled "Idea-66," VDOT began with four initial concepts:

- **Roadway Widening:** This would entail adding a lane in the westbound direction that stays within the existing right-of-way, or "footprint" of I-66 (essentially, eliminating the shoulders).

- **HOV/HOT Lanes:** This could include modification of the existing HOV restrictions (the hours defined as rush hour, and/or the

continued on page 6

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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



HAPPY NEW YEAR! I hope all of you had a good holiday season with family and friends, and rang in the New Year with lots of good cheer. I especially hope that those of you that were able to attend our year-end holiday party with the last minute change of location – sorry about that – enjoyed the event along with the wonderful food from Lebanese Taverna. Unfortunately, those of us who attended the party were having such a good time, that no one remembered to take photos for the newsletter. Alas. But the important thing is that the party was a success.

Now that we're all back at work, or school as the case may be, it's back to business. For the local environment that means continuing to work to close down the Mirant coal-fired power plant in Alexandria, the speaking out against the widening of I-66 and the beltway in Arlington and Fairfax, respectively, and speaking in favor of dedicated funding for Metro. Once again, our major environmental issues – as with any major urban area – largely relate to air quality and sprawl. These are our constant challenges, and I don't expect them to change.

At times, however, these issues seem so broad and pervasive that it can be hard for the public, much less our local officials, to focus on the downside of failing to act. And in the case of Metro, it certainly doesn't help that anti-tax groups see Metro as just a drain on public resources when if anything public monies should go towards public transportation. There simply is no better way to minimize the impact on our environment than through public transportation. Not that we all must or able to use Metro. But many of us do use it on occasion, especially on days when roads are closed for a major event, such as the presidential inauguration. Many of use would not be able to attend the July 4th celebrations on the mall without Metro.

Fortunately, all the WMATA jurisdiction members have signed onto the Metro Matters agreement, and bonds authorizing appropriations for funding of the agreement were overwhelmingly approved in Arlington and Fairfax counties last November. As a result, the \$1.5 billion generated under the agreement will

provide much-needed emergency capital funding for 120 new rail cars, new buses, and the rehabilitation of stations, tracks and systems to address overcrowding and delays. In addition, new rail cars will be online in two years.

There is a downside however in that Metro Matters is only a six-year funding program, which does not cover operating shortfalls or capital expenses for needed improvement and expansion projects. Therefore, the next major step for Metro is to obtain a stable source of dedicated funding to allow for the proper care and maintenance of the system over the long-term. We can't afford to let Metro fall into disrepair or let the system fail to keep pace with the growth of our greater community. I encourage you to speak out in favor of dedicated funding for Metro. Metro does matter!

Pat Soriano

The Mount Vernon Sierran invites members to participate by submitting articles, photos and first person experiences for publication. Also, if you're willing to attend and report on relevant area events and political meetings, contact the Group Chair for assignments.

Next issue:
APRIL/MAY/JUNE 2005
Submission Deadline is March 1st.

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

SENATOR ALLEN'S OFFICE: 202-224-4024, email: senator@allen.senate.gov;

SENATOR WARNER'S OFFICE: 202-224-2023, email senator@warner.senate.gov; **CONGRESSMAN DAVIS'S OFFICE** 202-225-1492,

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THE WHITE HOUSE CO: 202-456-6213; FAX line 2461, email the Presider

President by going to www.whitehouse.gov or

following the email prompts.



Air Quality Updates

by Ana Prados

In the past few issues of the MVG Sierran, you've read about several local and national Sierra initiatives designed to improve air quality in the D.C. area. What's happened since November? Read on to find out, and discover how you can get involved!

Sierra Club Lawsuit Against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

On December 15th, Earthjustice attorney David Baron filed suit against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The Sierra Club's lawsuit asks the court to mandate a 45-day deadline for the EPA to approve/disapprove the D.C. metro area's plans for meeting the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for ozone. The D.C. metro area currently does not meet the NAAQS for ozone (smog), creating the all-too-familiar "code red" days in summertime. Last February, an appeals court found that the current State Implementation Plan (SIP) for the D.C. metro area (Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C.), is deficient and does not address anti-smog measures that are required by the federal Clean Air Act. The Sierra Club also believes that the current SIP does not provide enough measures to curtail local sources of air pollution. See also related article from our fall newsletter, "Sierra Club Set to Sue EPA Over D.C. Area's Air Quality" for more background information.

Mirant Power Plant in Alexandria

The September/October 2004 newsletter described the MVG's present campaign to close or clean up the Mirant coal-fired power plant in Old Town Alexandria.

Over the past few months, the MVG has continued to actively support citizens and other groups in Alexandria in their fight against the single largest source of a number of key pollutants in Northern Virginia. We have participated in a number of public hearings to speak out for clean air in Alexandria and in October organized a "Fishless Fish-Fry," featuring fishless (veggie) fish dishes to highlight the dangers of mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants and the inadequacy of current federal laws in protecting us from mercury contamination in fish.

As a result of Mirant's violation of federal air quality emissions standards last summer, in September the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) released a proposed settlement agreement between the state of Maryland., the Commonwealth of Virginia., the EPA, the U.S. Department of Justice and Mirant corporation. At the public hearing on October 28th, the MVG, together with citizen groups in Alexandria, spoke out on the terms of the agreement.

Under the terms of the proposed agreement, Mirant must complete a computer modeling study to ascertain the impact of emissions from the plant on the air quality of the surrounding community. However, the decree does not state how Mirant would achieve compliance if the study shows that Mirant is violating federal and/or Virginia Ambient Air Quality Standards. Indeed, preliminary modeling studies performed by a consultant hired by the city of Alexandria suggest that stack emissions from the plant are leading to pollutant concentrations (for at least sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and mercury) that are many times greater than allowed by law.

The MVG stated that while the agreement requires significant reductions in NOx stack emissions at Mirant's power plants in MD, the reductions in Alexandria are insufficient to protect the health of the surrounding community from oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and other harmful pollutants, and that the ultimate solution is a complete shutdown.

The Alexandria City Government is also opposed to the terms of the agreement in its present form, citing, among other objections, insufficient NOx controls and faulty modeling protocols that exclude a study of impacts from other harmful pollutants, such as small particles. For more details on the consent decree and the city's response go to http://ci.alexandria.va.us/tes/eq/mirant_project.html.

Also this fall, the City of Alexandria proceeded with their proposed revisions to the City's zoning laws. This historic vote led to the revocation of two special use permits previously granted by the City to Mirant, as well as its present noncomplying use status. If you see any the Alexandria City Council members, be sure to thank them for their continued support in helping protect the

health of all Northern Virginians!

Over the next few months, the MVG will focus on generating support for the campaign by preparing a rally in late June. We are joined by friends and allies from the North Old Town Independent Civic Association (NOTICA), the Alexandria League of Women Voters and Alexandrians for Sensible Growth.

Furthermore, MVG members traveled to Richmond last month to participate in Lobby Day, sponsored by the Virginia Conservation Network. Our focus was the Clean Smokestacks Legislation introduced by Delegate Jack Reid of Henrico County. If passed by the General Assembly, this legislation will lead to 71 percent reductions in NOx and 86 percent reductions in SO₂ by 2011 from Virginia's 15 dirtiest power plants including—you guessed it—the Alexandria Mirant plant. DEQ would also be required to develop a strategy for reducing mercury emissions from power plants and other sources, and to study and develop a plan to control carbon dioxide emissions.

What You Can Do:

1. Write your Virginia General Assembly delegate and ask him or her to vote for the Clean Smokestacks Legislation.
2. Write the Alexandria City Council and thank them for their recent actions encouraging clean-up at the Mirant coal-fired power plant.
3. Get involved in planning the upcoming Mirant rally! Contact ana_prados@yahoo.com to answer questions, offer comments, receive campaign updates or obtain volunteer information. ☺

ENERGY CHOICES, from page 1

sumers in northern Virginia could choose to buy their electricity from Pepco Energy Services.

Pepco Energy Services offers residential customers a range of green energy products, including 51% to 100% new wind energy (the wind farms are in Pennsylvania) and from 10% to 100% "green" power (defined by Pepco Energy Services as hydroelectric plants, solar panels, wind farms and biomass fuels). Choosing to buy wind or green power can be done simply by going to the Pepco Energy Services website, <http://www.pepcoenergy.com> and contracting to

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Upcoming Events/Meetings/Activities

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 five-minute walk from the Ballston Metro stop on North Fairfax St. 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. Please bring a guest. For more information on these programs, contact Andrew Nicholls, programs chair, at 703-536-5047, aknicholls@cox.net.

February 8, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

TOPIC: Chesapeake Clean Water Campaign

Every year, nearly 300 million pounds of nitrogen enter the Chesapeake Bay – from sewage treatment plants, air pollution and agriculture. This nitrogen overload keeps the Bay on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "dirty waters" list and prevents any real progress to improve water quality. It also undermines encouraging efforts to restore natural resources, such as underwater grasses, crabs, and oysters. Nitrogen pollution is the Bay's number one problem today. Come hear a representative from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) discuss strategies for improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay via launch of the Chesapeake Clean Water Campaign. Become more knowledgeable about the nitrogen pollution pressures facing the Bay, and what you can do to help clean it up, both in your own life and by encouraging legislative action.

March 8, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

TOPIC: The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust: A Decade of Success

The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) is a

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SALES AND LEASING

501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust dedicated to preserving and enhancing the natural and historic resources of Northern Virginia. The vice president of NVCT, Mike Nardolilli, will provide an overview of recent successes and the strategies the NVCT uses to conserve land in our area. NVCT is celebrating 10 years of land conservation with a record of permanently protecting over 1170 acres of environmentally sensitive properties in Northern Virginia. Since its founding in 1994, NVCT has recorded 46 conservation easements and owns seven Nature Preserves, including a 70-acre heronry in Stafford County. Through its public-private partnerships with local jurisdictions, NVCT is working to implement the Open Space Master Plans adopted by the Counties of Arlington and Fairfax as well as the City of Alexandria.

GROUP COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Executive Committee (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:

Wednesday, February 23, 6:30 p.m.

Thursday, April 7, 6:30 p.m.

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. All MVG members are welcome to attend! 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: February 17, 7:00-8:30 p.m., March 17, 7:00-8:30 p.m. and April 21, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

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: Tuesday, March 22, 6:30 p.m.

GROUP SOCIAL EVENTS

The METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON REGIONAL OUTINGS PROGRAM (MWRPOP) at <http://mwrpop.org/index.html> provides a wide range 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/>.

DESIGNSENSE

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The Sierran**

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

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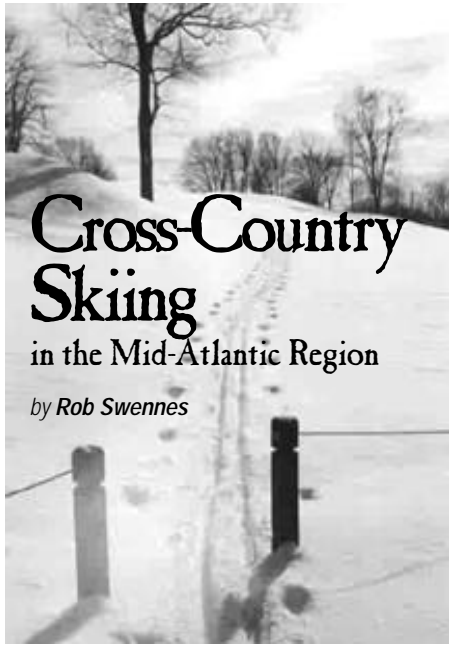
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Limited	24	32

Annual dues include subscriptions to SIERRA (\$7.50) and chapter publications (\$1). dues are not tax deductible. enclose your check and mail to: Sierra Club, P.O.Box 52968, Boulder, Colorado 80322-2968

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Cross-Country Skiing

in the Mid-Atlantic Region

by Rob Swennes

Photo © Leith Bornstein. All rights reserved.

I LEARNED TO SKI in West Germany in the early 1980s. I found cross-country skiing (also called Nordic skiing) so much fun that I wanted to continue upon our family's return to the Washington, D.C. area. Most people who cross-country ski find that it connects them to the outdoors in a way that downhill skiing cannot. Perhaps it is the greater solitude and the lesser reliance on man-made "improvements" like ski lifts that make it such an attractive sport. While there are always glitzy ads drawing people out to downhill ski resorts in the mid-Atlantic states, information on Nordic skiing venues is harder to come by. This article is intended to give people who have done some cross-country skiing (or who are ski wanna-be's) some idea of how to learn the sport and enjoy it in this part of the country.

For newcomers to cross-country skiing, the first issue is always equipment. Fortunately Nordic ski equipment is far less expensive than downhill ski gear. One ski shop that rents equipment for both types of skiing is Ski Chalet, 2704 Columbia Pike in Arlington (703-521-1700). You can rent skis, boots and poles there for \$25 per day. If you find yourself falling in love with the sport, the next step is to buy your own equipment. Several outdoors equipment stores in our area sell cross-country ski gear. Check, for example, with the REI and LL Bean stores in Northern Virginia, or look at their offerings by catalog or online. If you really want

to go first class, check out the web site for the New Moon Ski Shop in Wisconsin (<http://www.newmoonski.com>). Don't be intimidated by the shots of lean twenty-somethings skiing along at breakneck speed. New Moon also has gear for the more casual skier.

In all but perhaps the most urban settings, it is highly recommended that you ski with a companion. There are a host of safety reasons for this. Remember that the temperatures are likely to be below freezing, and accidents can happen. The buddy system is the best precaution that you can take. Plus, it is a lot more fun sharing the moment with another person.

Many would say that the best location for skiing is right out your own front door. When we get a sizeable snow in the Washington area, cross-country skiers RULE. The city can shut down, but if you've got your own cross-country ski gear, all the parks and trails (and many of the streets) belong to you. Get out for your skiing as soon as the snow stops, since the street clearing crews will be working against you.

What could be more liberating than skiing to the nearest Metro station, taking the train down to Rosslyn, and then skiing from the front of the station and down the Mount Vernon Trail to do a loop around Roosevelt Island? A friend and I were able to do that last winter. We then skied across Memorial Bridge and tried a bit of "downhill" action on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. After skiing up Capitol Hill, we found a local restaurant and had a good meal before taking the Metro back home.

Remember you can ski on any local bike trails. A favorite trek for many local skiers is to use the W&OD trail that heads west out of town. Avoid portions of trail that go under streets, because you'll find no snow there! Other favorite local options include the C&O Canal towpath or—if driving conditions permit—a drive out to the Manassas battlefield.

There are many more distant ski venues north and west of Washington, D.C. The most developed cross-country ski area in the mid-Atlantic is White Grass Ski Touring Center (STC) in Canaan Valley in West Virginia (<http://www.whitegrass.com/>). There you can rent equipment, take lessons, and enjoy both leisurely valley trails and some rugged mountainside ascents if you wish. If

spending a long weekend in Canaan Valley, good Nordic skiing is also available at Canaan Valley State Park and around Blackwater Falls State Park.

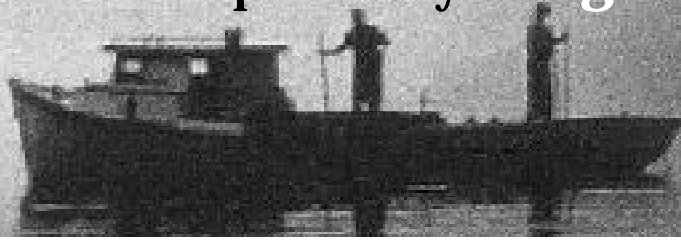
In Maryland, I have always enjoyed skiing at New Germany State Park in the far west of the state in Garrett County. There is a modern motel at the exit just past the park. In the nearby town of Grantsville (<http://www.grantsvillemd.com/>), clean and simple accommodations are available at the historic Casselman Inn (<http://www.thecasselmann.com/>), which offers meals with an Amish touch all days except Sunday. The Penn Alps Restaurant in town also has excellent food.

Many cross-country skiers in this area belong to the Ski Touring Section (STS) of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (<http://www.patc.net/chapters/ski/>). That group of several hundred skiers organizes trips throughout the winter months to good ski locations both in the mid-Atlantic area and points beyond. The trip schedule on the STS web site offers excursions into New York and New England, out West, and up into Canada. The trips are reasonably priced and draw together active people who, in the warmer months, are probably to be found out hiking, biking or sailing.

Finally, one of the most fascinating and compelling features of cross-country skiing is the entry it allows you into a different world from that of the everyday and commonplace. Six inches of white and a good set of skis can transform a local street or trail or park into a totally new experience and one that draws you to commune closely with nature. A couple of hours of this type of skiing offer a full-body workout that can burn calories faster than almost any other sport. Get hooked, and you'll really favor the coldest of the four seasons. You'll glide silently through the trees and across the fields with a strong sense that this is the way life was meant to be. ☺

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 non-member subscription inquiries and address changes: call 1-800-765-7904 toll-free or write to Sierra, P.O. Box 52968, Boulder, CO 80328.

The Chesapeake Bay: Dangerously Out of Balance.



When: February 8, 2005, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

What: Come hear a representative from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF) discuss strategies for improving the health of the Chesapeake Bay via launch of the **Chesapeake Clean Water Campaign**. Become more knowledgeable about the nitrogen pollution pressures facing the Bay, and what you can do to help clean it up, both in your own life and by encouraging legislative action.

Every year, nearly 300 million pounds of nitrogen enter the Chesapeake Bay from sewage treatment plants, air pollution and agriculture. This nitrogen overload keeps the Bay on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "dirty waters" list and prevents any real progress to improve water quality. It also undermines encouraging efforts to restore natural resources, such as underwater grasses, crabs and oysters. Nitrogen pollution is the Bay's number one problem today.

While it's tragic that this national treasure operates at less than one-third of its historic potential, the trends that degrade its health *are* reversible. But it will take many concerned Bay citizens to demand that our leaders act now to stem—and eventually turn—the tide of this pollution.

To build this support, CBF has launched the **Chesapeake Clean Water Campaign**, a multi-year initiative designed to cut in half the overall amount of nitrogen pollution entering the Bay. Failure to reduce nitrogen by 50 percent will also mean a failure to meet 2010 goals outlined in the Chesapeake 2000 agreement for water clarity, dissolved oxygen and underwater grasses. With that in mind, a major goal of the Campaign is to upgrade the watershed's inadequate sewage treatment plants to reduce harmful nutrients. Come learn how CBF plans to achieve this worthy goal.

Where: NRECA Building, 4301 Wilson Blvd, Arlington. (NRECA is located at the corner of North Taylor Blvd. and Wilson Blvd.) Within walking distance of the Ballston Metro. Free parking *under* the building off of N. Taylor.

I-66 Congestion, from page 1 number of persons per vehicle) to ease congestion; a HOT lane solution would entail tolling single occupant vehicles on I-66 westbound during rush hour.

- **Improved Transit:** Possible solutions here include the adding train cars to existing orange line Metrorail; Bus Rapid Transit; express bus service; and/or additional light rail to the Tysons and Dulles areas.

- **No-Build:** Possible solutions might include incentives for telecommuting, improved signal timing on parallel roads, "spot" modifications to I-66 on ramps where congestion typically occurs, and carpooling incentives.

VDOT plans to formulate its draft report this February, with a targeted completion of March 2005 for the final report.

VDOT has said its Idea-66 study is dif-

ferent from other, previous transportation studies because it utilizes a "context sensitive solutions" approach through an open, inclusive, community-driven process. Thus far, VDOT has interviewed key community leaders and groups, and last October/November it held a series of 3 public meetings.

Some community groups—most notably the Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation (ACST)—have expressed a different perspective on how open and inclusive VDOT's process has been. In a letter to Virginia Transportation Secretary Clement dated December 15, ACST's leadership requested an improved public involvement process to include the immediate release of VDOT's draft "problem statement," a full list of the alternatives under study, and a full list of the evaluation criteria VDOT is considering for the study. ACST requested that the draft study report and evaluation matrix for the study be posted on the Idea-66 project Web site for a 30-day public comment period. To date, this has not happened.

It's only a matter of weeks—not months—before VDOT releases its final study report. For more information about

continued on page 8

Seth Eaton

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The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust: A Decade of Success

WHEN: March 8, 2005, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. (socializing from 7:00 to 7:30)

WHAT: The Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit land trust dedicated to preserving and enhancing the natural and historic resources of Northern Virginia. The vice president of NVCT, Mike Nardolilli, will provide an overview of recent successes and the strategies the NVCT uses to conserve land in our area.

NVCT is celebrating 10 years of land conservation with a record of permanently protecting over 1170 acres of environmentally sensitive properties in Northern Virginia. Since its founding in 1994, NVCT has recorded 46 conservation easements and owns seven nature preserves, including a 70 acre heronry in Stafford County. Through its public-private partnerships with local jurisdictions, NVCT is working to implement the Open Space Master Plans adopted by the Counties of Arlington and Fairfax as well as the City of Alexandria.

WHO: Mike Nardolilli is vice president and general counsel of the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, a position he has held since 1999. For almost 20 years prior to joining NVCT, Mr. Nardolilli was a litigator with several D.C. law firms. He has long been active in Arlington County affairs and has held numerous civic and



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political posts, including chair of the Arlington County Transportation Commission and vice chairman of the Arlington County Democratic Committee. He currently serves as president of the Arlington Outdoor Lab, a 210 acre nature educational facility in Broad Run, Virginia.

WHERE: NRECA Building, 4301 Wilson Blvd, Arlington. (NRECA is at the corner of North Taylor Blvd and Wilson Blvd) Within walking distance of the Ballston Metro. Free parking under the building off of N. Taylor.

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buy green or wind for a year.

Question: Okay, but before even thinking about switching, I would like to be more informed about the status quo. So, in Virginia, which fuels are used to generate the electricity we all use?

Short Answer: In Virginia, nearly 90% of the power is generated by coal-fired power plants and nuclear reactors.³

Longer Answer: According to the Energy

³ These data are from 2002, the latest year provided on EIA's website. For the specific time series data, go to http://www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/electricity/st_profiles/virginia.pdf

Information Administration (EIA), an independent statistical agency within the U.S. Department of Energy, we get the electricity for all our services – lighting, water heating, heating, air conditioning, dishwashers, elevators, manufacturing processes and computers – from two dominant sources: coal and uranium. Coal-fired power plants provide 51% of our power (measured in terms of megawatt hours), as of the latest EIA year, 2002.3 Virginia's nuclear reactors (2 units near Williamsburg and 2 in Louisa County) provide 37%. Oil-fired plants provide 5% and natural gas 6%. Renewable energy, including hydropower dams and wind farms and solar

power and waste-to-energy plants, provided 2% of Virginia's power needs. (All of these numbers are averages for the entire state.)

So, when you turn on the lights, or turn on your computer, or demand a cool interior when it is muggy outside, your power demand is either resulting in coal combustion, as well as the burning of other fossil fuels, or the use of uranium in nuclear reactors.

To put our power demand in perspective, our demand for electricity in Virginia required 15.4 million tons of coal.

Question: Does Virginia's electric power profile differ from that of the U.S. overall?

Short Answer: Virginia and the rest of the country are essentially identical in terms of coal's dominance and renewables' relative insignificance. Thereafter there are significant differences.

Longer Answer: Not in terms of the dominance of coal or the minority position of renewable energy. Nationally, as with Virginia, coal provides over half of the nation's electricity. Nationally, non-hydro renewables only contribute 1% of the kilowatt hours we use, whereas in Virginia it is a little higher, but not much. (Yes, despite everything you may have read, all the wind and solar and geothermal and waste-to-energy plants constitute only 1% of the nation's total power production.)

But there are significant differences after that. Our other national fuel shares are as follows (with Virginia's in parentheses for comparison): nuclear 22% (36%), natural gas 13% (5%), oil 3% (7%), and hydropower 6% (0%).

Question: Which kind of power sources have the least negative impacts on the quality of our air and water, and the least negative impacts on our lands?

Short answer: There is no short summary answer. You *personally* must weigh the various environmental pro's and con's of different power sources, and then translate your values into action. And all power sources have some environmental negatives.

Longer answer: The term "environmental impacts" is actually pretty vague. When we are discussing how electric power is generated, we have to be very specific in terms of the environmental consequences. What environmental "metric" is being evaluated?

Emissions of greenhouse gases and global climate change? Emissions of mercury and

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the status of the study, what happens after the study is released, or how you can get involved, visit the following Web sites:

VDOT/FHWA Idea-66 Official Web Site: www.idea66.com

Arlington Coalition for Sensible Transportation: www.acstnet.org ☺

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other heavy metals? Emissions of particulates? Destruction of mountains in Appalachia? The storage of spent nuclear fuel for thousands of years? Nitrogen loading in the Chesapeake Bay? The deaths of birds and bats? Visual impacts from air pollution, or from noisy wind turbines on mountain ridges? Acid rain impacts from emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides in mountain forests in Virginia? Loss of entire river ecosystems under dammed reservoirs, as has occurred all over the American West? Exploration for natural gas in pristine rain forests in South America?

The complexity can be illustrated by simply comparing Virginia's two largest power producers, coal-fired plants and nuclear reactors, with a "new" source, wind turbines. Let us suppose that you must pick one of the three.

Coal is far and away the dirtiest of the fossil fuels. It produces emissions of carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury, and nitrogen dioxide. Wind power produces no air pollutants. Neither does nuclear power. Coal mining in Appalachia destroys entire mountain and stream ecosystems. Neither wind nor nuclear destroy mountains or streams in Ap-

"One Thing" cover art designed by Christopher Richard, Sierra Club volunteer. Christopher may be reached at mr_christopher@mac.com.

palachia.

However, spent fuel from nuclear reactors must be stored safely for thousands of years, something no nation has yet figured out how to do. Coal and wind do not face any long-long-term storage challenge.

Finally, wind turbines are not without impact. Proposed 300 foot wind turbines off Cape Cod are being opposed because of their visual impacts, and turbines in West Virginia appear to be killing thousands of bats (1/1/05 *Washington Post*).

So, if you do not want any air pollution or greenhouse gas emissions, you choose nuclear or wind. If you do not want Appalachia to be flat in fifty years, you choose nuclear or wind. But if bat deaths and potential bird deaths concern you more than

long-term spent fuel concerns, than nuclear power might be the best of the three choices. If you think nuclear spent fuel is both a huge environmental and security risk, then wind power looks like the right choice for you.

My own answer: In the above example of picking among coal, nuclear and wind, I'd pick wind, but, if and only if, I was convinced that bat and avian mortality was not a major issue and that 300-foot wind turbines were not going to be capping many forested mountain ridges. (I am not convinced of that yet, in this area, due to the alarming Washington Post story). If I were not convinced, then I would pick nuclear power, because I think mankind will solve the storage issue.

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