



RAPPAHANNOCK GROUP
SIERRA CLUB

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Explore, Enjoy, and Protect the Planet

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Virginia Outdoors Foundation

The Sierra Club is the oldest and largest grassroots environmental community in the world. We practice what we preach, encouraging all to explore their surroundings, enjoy its diversity, and protect its future for our children and grandchildren. The Rappahannock Group (RGSC) represents the area from Stafford to Orange, to Spotsylvania and Fredericksburg, and down through King George, Caroline, and Westmoreland Counties. We think globally but focus locally.

Downtown Greens is the embodiment of our beliefs, putting them into action in our local area. The thought of paving over more wetlands and farmland is an anathema to our members. More traffic, more vehicles, and more greenhouse gases are exactly the opposite of what we need.

Farmland, managed under organic, sustainable practices, is exactly what will help us get through the climate crisis. You have to walk through fields growing food to understand how nature combats pests. You have to see bumblebees and butterflies pollinating our crops to understand their role, before you can understand just how catastrophic their demise will be. The pandemic is forcing us to rethink how we farm, what we eat, and where our food comes from, driving the move towards local sourcing.

Wetlands that purify water, provide habitat, and allow pollinators to thrive is critical to our survival. Without pollinators our food sources will become very, very limited, as virtually all our food needs to be pollinated to become edible. We need to be able to teach our young people about why wetlands are important, and you can't do that effectively on a chalkboard. You need to carefully walk with boots through the terrain to make it clear how important wetlands are to our environment and our water.

I often say I'm a New Yorker by birth, but a Virginian by choice. I grew up in a densely populated area on Long Island, where the only chance to see nature was to go down to the ocean. Farms on Long Island's sandy soil were especially suited for growing potatoes and strawberries. I remember family strawberry-picking trips with cautions, sometimes ignored, to not eat the berries until the pesticides were washed off. But as the housing boom surged, those farms were sold off and replaced with single-family houses, paved roads, and manicured, pesticide-laden lawns.

We have a chance here to preserve a bit of nature for ourselves and the future. We need to take action to do it while we can. Once the area is hardened by truck traffic and paved roads, the water is polluted by oil spills and chemical dumping, and the air reeks with chemical fumes and CO2 it will be too late.

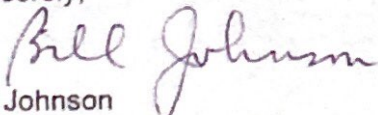
We need to keep sustainable agriculture local, and not allow our last farm to disappear under the weight of development. Maintaining a local farm enables our community to interact with farmers and see how our food is raised. Downtown Greens teaches youngsters how to sustainably grow food. That knowledge will significantly reduce the possible insecurities caused by food shortages. It will enable youngsters to think of the food over the entire year, from harvesting food in season, to preserving food for out of season use.

Growing your own food, on apartment balconies, in containers, and in back-yard beds will enable our residents to be more independent and healthier. People will understand that left over food, if it's simply too far past being edible, is great compost for their plants. This is especially true if the food is grown free of pesticides.

Downtown Greens offers a vision of the future where innovations in food production and environmental stewardship walk together towards a sustainable future. Hands-on learning easily eclipses classroom training in its effectiveness when planting and growing food. Getting your hands dirty broadens the horizons of young people when figuring out how to make the best use of scarce resources, like clean water.

We urge you to support Downtown Greens in their quest to ensure that the last farm in Fredericksburg remain as it is, an amalgam of farm and wetlands. We all need to protect the future, and this is a small step in that direction.

Sincerely,


Bill Johnson

Chair, Rappahannock Group of the Sierra Club

Virginia Chapter Secretary, ExCom member, and Fracking Issues Co-Chair