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**SOUTHERN
ENVIRONMENTAL
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CENTER**

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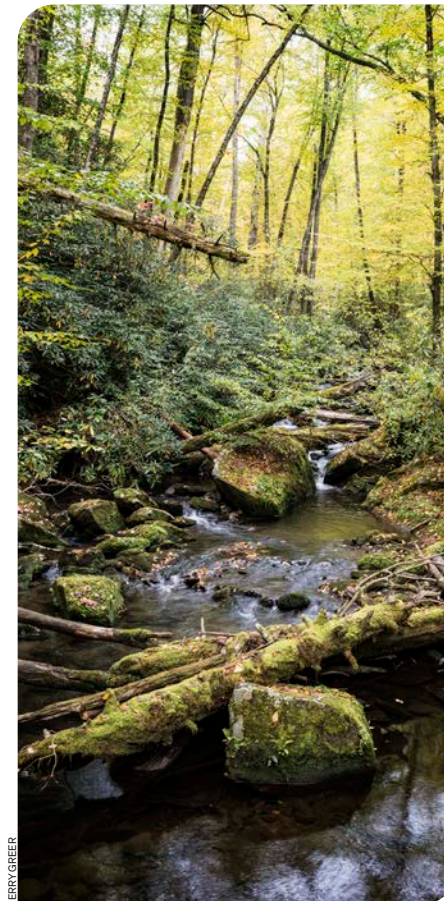
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The Southern Environmental Law Center is one of the nation's most powerful defenders of the environment, rooted in the South. With a long track record, SELC takes on the toughest environmental challenges in court, in government, and in our communities.

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**CHAPEL HILL
CHARLOTTESVILLE
ATLANTA
ASHEVILLE
BIRMINGHAM
CHARLESTON
NASHVILLE
RICHMOND
WASHINGTON, D.C.**



Dear Friends of SELC,

If you are anything like me, whenever I receive an email, a postcard, or this magazine from SELC, it transforms my day because I can always count on news that will lift my spirits. The stories shared inspire me. The victories achieved make me want to tell everyone about the wonderful work happening right here in the South. And for me, it's a comfort knowing I can count on this organization to be on the frontlines, protecting our environment and the health of communities across the region.

This issue is no exception, from seeing the persistence of SELC and our partners committed to keeping toxic forever chemicals from our waters, to a journey deep into old-growth forests to understand their role as a climate solution today and for generations to come. You will find hope in these pages and inspiration to act.

Today's stakes for our environmental future have never been higher — but the opportunities have also never been greater. Every day, SELC works to advance clean energy, right environmental injustices, stop pollution, protect nature, and combat climate change. This is the moment where we must think big and act now to ensure our environmental future.

This is why I support this incredible nonprofit organization with my time and money. SELC relies on people like you and me to make their work possible. I hope you will join me in backing SELC to think big as they work to achieve more monumental environmental victories in 2024 and beyond.

With gratitude,

Laura Gates
Chair, SELC Board of Trustees

Fighting forever chemicals

PFAS ARE PERSISTENT, BUT SO ARE THOSE HOLDING POLLUTERS ACCOUNTABLE

By Stephanie Hunt; photos by Cornell Watson

Carrol Olinger never planned on being a rabble-rouser.

She and her family loved the quiet, rural life in Hope Mills, North Carolina — a small town an hour south of Fayetteville, named for the cotton mills nearby. For years, Olinger was a teaching assistant at Alderman Road Elementary School and led Girl Scout adventures, taking her troop fishing along the Cape Fear River. “I enjoyed scuba diving and snorkeling in it too. It’s still fun even if you can’t see anything,” she says of the 202-mile waterway — the state’s largest river system, which like many tannin-stained rivers, is often murky, like diluted chocolate milk. “But I don’t anymore.”

Not since Olinger, her neighbors, and the 500,000 North Carolinians downstream whose drinking water comes from the river learned that natural tannins aren’t the only thing muddying the Cape Fear.

These days, Olinger has traded scuba for diving deep into the river basin’s long history of industrial pollution, including the 40-plus years that DuPont and, more recently its spin-off, Chemours, have been discharging toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly known as PFAS, into the Cape Fear and contaminating groundwater. Like a seasoned scout leader, she’s determined, feisty, and outspoken about how that contamination disproportionately impacts “people who look like me — Brown and Black people. Those who don’t have health insurance and can barely



pronounce polyfluora-whatever or reverse osmosis, much less afford it,” Olinger says.

“I’m an accidental activist,” she laughs, though she knows that these so-called “forever chemicals” are deadly serious. Their common name speaks to the durable, resilient qualities that make them useful in innumerable products — waterproof, stain-resistant, nonstick products, electronics, medical devices, beauty products, explosives, dental floss, you name it — but also to the fact that they don’t break down in the environment and our bodies. PFAS have been linked to cancer, kidney and liver disease, immune dysfunction, endocrine disruption, infertility, asthma, and low birth weight, among other conditions. “Here I am on dialysis, with no family history of kidney disease,” Olinger says.

When the Wilmington StarNews broke the story in June 2017 that the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority was contaminated by GenX, a PFAS compound discharged by Chemours, “It started making sense, why I was sick and the fish in my fish tank were dying,” says Olinger.

She is now an area organizer for Action NC, a statewide advocacy group addressing social and economic inequality. Realizing there was more to the story,

“Dig deeper!” became Olinger’s rallying cry at local protests and public hearings.

Stopping pollution at its source

Like Olinger and most North Carolinians, SELC Program Director Geoff Gisler first learned of the Cape Fear’s contamination from that newspaper story. Then serving as SELC’s Water Program lead, Gisler didn’t just dig deeper, he excavated. “We worked with our partners at Cape Fear River Watch to learn as much as we could, and to strategize how best to hold the polluters accountable,” Gisler says.

The Clean Water Act already provides the means to do so, he explains, but manufacturers like Chemours were taking advantage of lax enforcement and the public’s lack of awareness at the time. Chemours continued to profit as they released contaminated discharges; meanwhile taxpayers and ratepayers were footing the bill for testing and for upgraded filtration systems: \$43 million for the Cape Fear Public Utility Authority alone, with an additional \$5 million in annual maintenance costs. Brunswick County will spend more than \$100 million upgrading its drinking water plant to filter out Chemours’ pollution. “Chemours was completely reckless and ignored what they knew to be the reality of these chemicals,” says Gisler.

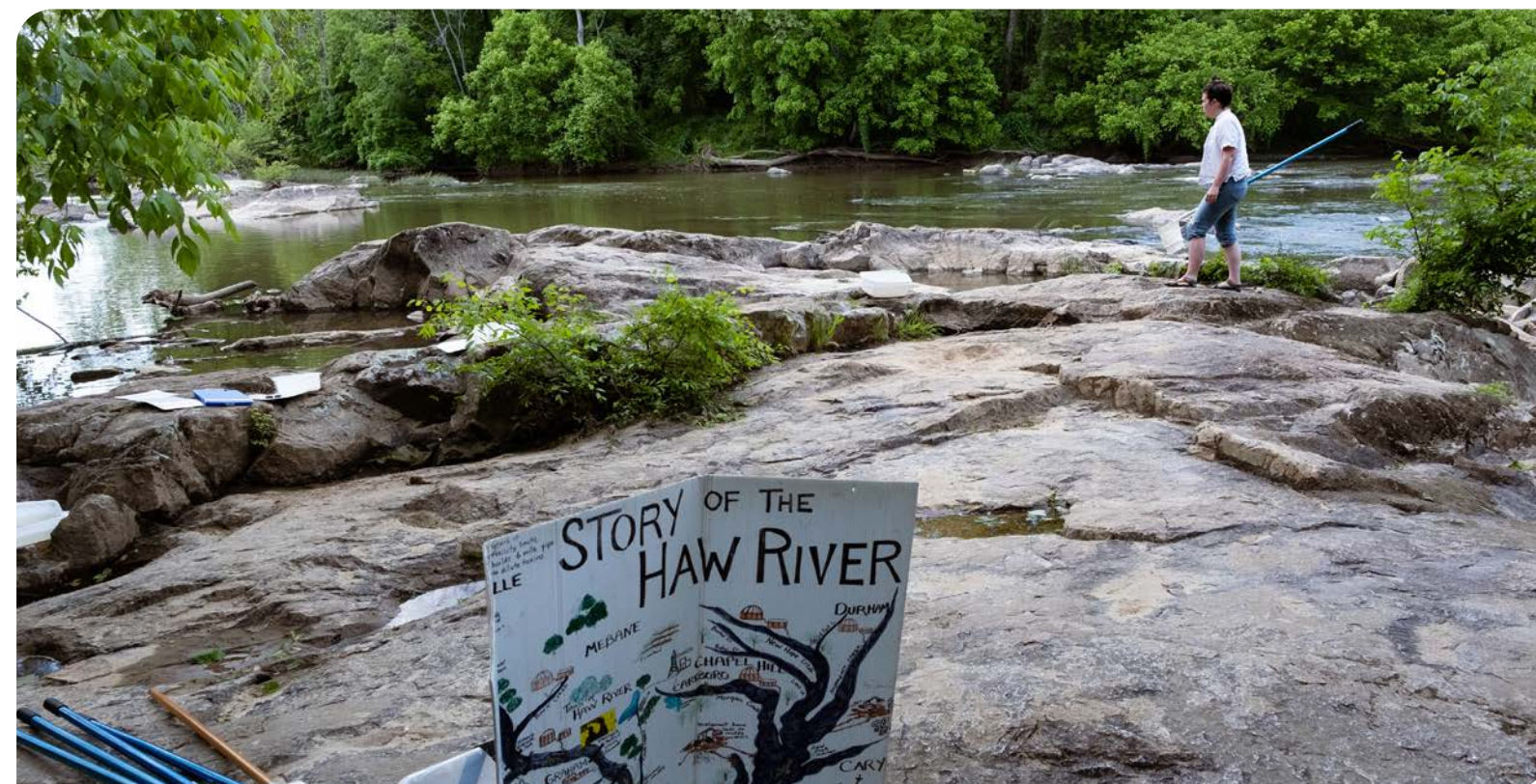
DuPont and 3M, in fact, have known for decades that PFOA, an earlier type of PFAS, and later modifications, including GenX, are dangerous. DuPont’s own findings dating from 1965 suggest as much, and later studies from the 1970s to the present consistently point to concerning public health impacts.

Despite increasing awareness that PFAS are a threat to communities, industry continues to try to avoid responsibility for pollution by claiming scientific uncertainty. “Based on the information we have, we know enough to act,” Gisler asserts, contradicting claims that more information is needed to establish safety levels. The Clean Water Act of 1972 was designed to eliminate all water pollution of every kind by 1985, explains Gisler, “and that is our goal, to stop water pollution at its source. Period.”

Dana Sargent, executive director of the nonprofit Cape Fear River Watch, agrees. “PFAS shouldn’t be in the drinking water of millions of Americans,” Sargent wrote in a 2020 op-ed, a year after her 47-year-old brother, a firefighter, died of a brain tumor after a career of exposure to cancer-causing PFAS chemicals used in firefighting.

As a former journalist and communications specialist turned clean water advocate, Sargent knows how to

Left: Carrol Olinger and her husband by the Cape Fear River. Below: Haw Riverkeeper Emily Sutton nets samples of the river’s aquatic life to share during the annual Haw River Festival.



go after a source. Alongside Gisler, she was already “full force” into learning about PFAS, but with her brother’s diagnosis in 2017, “it became personal,” she says. Similarly, her colleague, Cape Fear Riverkeeper Kemp Burdette, had grown up along the Lower Cape Fear, and his father was battling kidney cancer. “There was no question that SELC would be our partner in this fight,” says Sargent. “I have massive trust in their knowledge and expertise. They totally have our backs.”

In May 2018, SELC filed a lawsuit on behalf of Cape Fear River Watch against Chemours and government officials for not acting fast enough to stop the toxic pollution. In 2019, SELC reached a settlement with those officials and Chemours that required a massive cleanup, with the company agreeing to cut water and air pollution by at least 99 percent.

Broadening impact

SELC’s wins in North Carolina, both in the Chemours case and in Burlington and Greensboro, where wastewater treatment plants were discharging contaminated water into the Haw River, which is part of the Cape Fear River system and water source for communities including Pittsboro and Chapel Hill, have already had positive effects, driving policy changes. SELC

leveraged its expertise to “push the state to finalize the most effective permit in the country,” says Gisler, “and we continue to push for stronger oversight and enforcement by state agencies.”

Today these efforts are reflected nationwide in the EPA’s new guidance to states, directing them to use existing powers under the Clean Water Act to stop PFAS pollution at its source and hold polluters accountable. And in March 2023, when EPA Administrator Michael Regan announced the first-ever proposed national drinking water standards for six PFAS chemicals, as well as a requirement for municipalities to test for 29 PFAS types, he did so on the banks of the Cape Fear River — reinforcing the influential role SELC and local partners have played fighting these toxic forever chemicals.

The work, however, is far from over. As public awareness grows and testing for PFAS expands, combatting forever chemicals might feel like a forever fight. Even so, every victory is powerful. In Northwest Georgia, where PFAS-producing textile and carpet manufacturers are plentiful, SELC was able to trace PFAS contamination to Mount Vernon Mills, a textile plant on the Chattooga River in Trion, Georgia. Unlike Chemours, the Georgia polluter wasn’t putting pollution straight into the river; instead the mill was sending PFAS-polluted industrial wastewater to the City of Trion’s waste-



SELC Program Director Geoff Gisler in Wilmington, N.C.

water treatment plant. Like nearly all municipal water treatment facilities, Trion’s was not equipped to remove these chemicals, which then contaminated the plant’s sewage sludge and eventually the surrounding watershed.

“Industrial polluters are required by law to control PFAS pollution instead of placing the burden on communities downstream,” says Chris Bowers, an Atlanta-based SELC senior attorney who used that argument to file a Georgia civil suit on behalf of Coosa River Basin Initiative. Under the resulting March 2023 court-enforceable agreement, Mount Vernon Mills must permanently halt PFAS use at their Trion facility this year. Prevention, notes Bowers, is the ideal method to control pollution.

Nimble and vigilant

According to Gisler and Bowers, these successes all come back to having engaged citizens and to partnering with the grassroots organizations SELC represents. “Like SELC, our clients are nimble and uniquely suited to identify problems and help us quickly drive toward fixes,” Bowers adds. “We will continue to lead the way in our region, putting industry and the regulated community on notice that they have an obligation to handle these dangerous chemicals lawfully, that there’s no more waiting.”

“At the end of the day, we all just want to go home and feel safe when we turn on the tap. We want that for everyone.”

—GEOFF GISLER, SELC PROGRAM DIRECTOR



A sign from the parade at this year’s Haw River Festival.

The ultimate goal is to bring hope back to communities like Hope Mills. “We can make the legal arguments, but it’s the personal stories of people like Carrol and Dana that move decision-makers. Sure, many might think a 99 percent PFAS reduction is great, but when you see the emotional toll of what that 1 percent means to a community who has suffered decades of exposure, that changes things,” says Gisler. For years, families like the Olingers enjoyed what they believed to be their “idyllic rural life, with their land and garden, their little patch of the world they feel safe in,” he adds. Discovering their water is unsafe robs them of that peace. “At the end of the day,” Gisler says, “we all just want to go home and feel safe when we turn on the tap. We want that for everyone.” ■

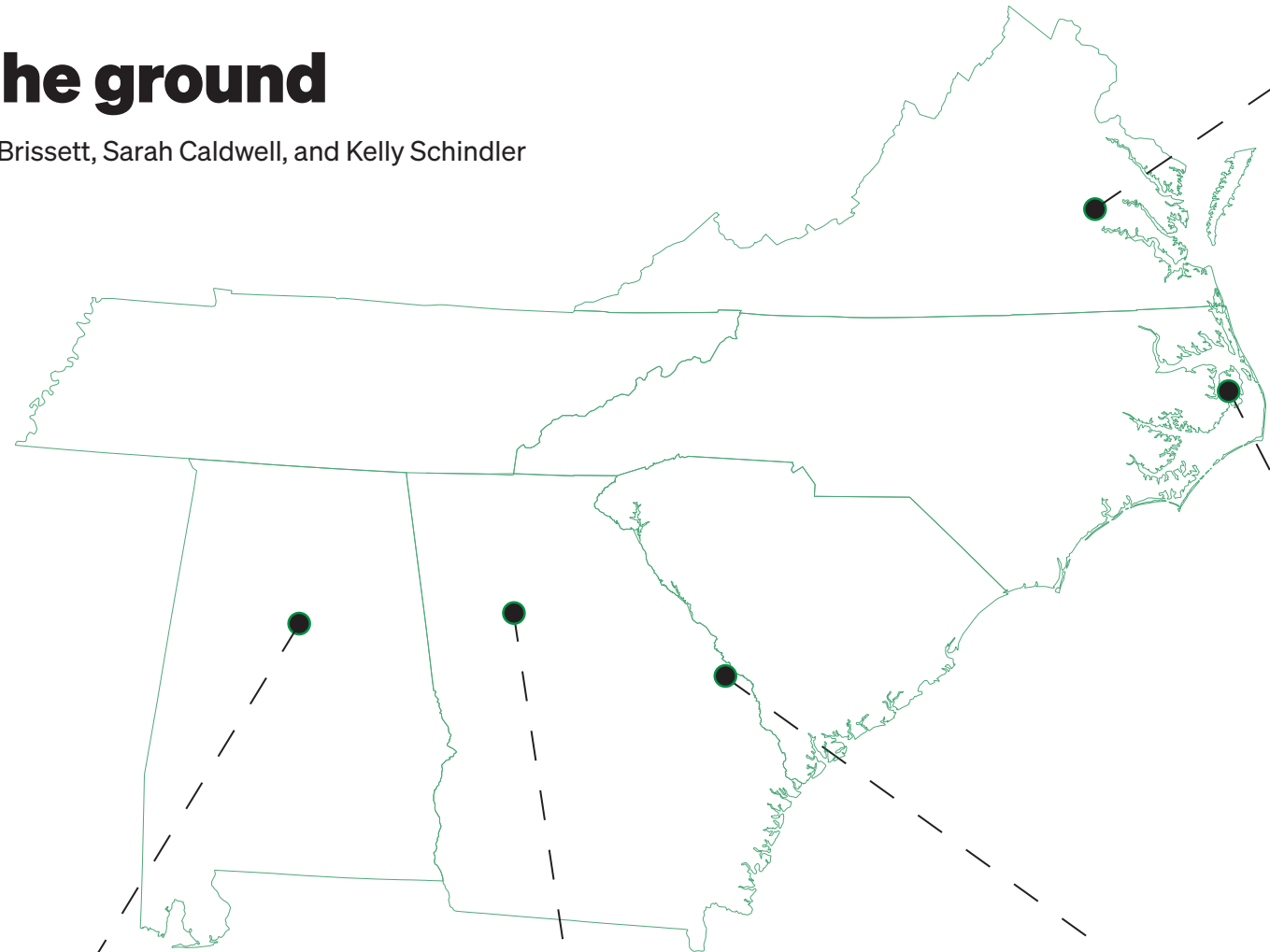


Left: Learning about aquatic life during the Haw River Festival. Right: Cape Fear Riverkeeper Kemp Burdette collects water samples from the river as part of Cape Fear River Watch’s regular testing program.



On the ground

By Wilson Brissett, Sarah Caldwell, and Kelly Schindler



BIRMINGHAM, AL
Legacy victory for Birmingham's drinking water

Hundreds of thousands of Birmingham residents now have cleaner drinking water for generations to come. Although the city's water board promised decades ago to protect a natural buffer from development, it never did, giving many a false sense of security about the source of their drinking water. With our partners at the Cahaba Riverkeeper and Cahaba River Society, SELC went to court, fought, and won for the protection of 7,000 forested acres, guaranteed for the next 75 years.



ATLANTA, GA
The Stitch reimagines Atlanta

Atlanta's Downtown Connector highway is a powerful symbol in the South's largest city of how "urban renewal" and the interstate system divided Black communities and entrenched polluting automobile travel. Now, one plan aims to address that and link Downtown and Midtown Atlanta. The Stitch project — a cap over the Downtown Connector — is looking to use a federal Reconnecting Communities grant to build 14 acres of walkable, bikeable green space. The Stitch will create a new urban fabric in the heart of the city, linking a transit hub with planned affordable housing, park space, and mixed-use development.

"I'm incredibly proud of this win. Protecting this land and water for my grandchildren's children is the biggest thing I've done in my career."

— SARAH STOKES, SENIOR ATTORNEY

RICHMOND, VA
SELC sues to uphold Virginia's climate progress

When Virginia officials voted to exit the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), SELC responded with a lawsuit, reminding them RGGI membership is already law and widely supported by Virginians. The program is also the best way to keep the Commonwealth on track to its goal of zero-carbon power by 2050. By putting a price on carbon pollution, Virginia already received more than \$730 million that it uses to fund home weatherization and help local governments address flooding issues.



ALLIGATOR RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, NC
Good news for red wolves

At a time of alarming biodiversity loss, the American red wolf is offering renewed hope in our region. SELC secured a historic settlement following years of litigation, committing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to essential conservation efforts they'd abandoned. North Carolina is home to the only wild population of red wolves in the world, and this victory comes at a critical moment when as few as 13 known adult wolves remain in the wild.

WAYNESBORO, GA
Georgia utility customers win in Vogtle deal

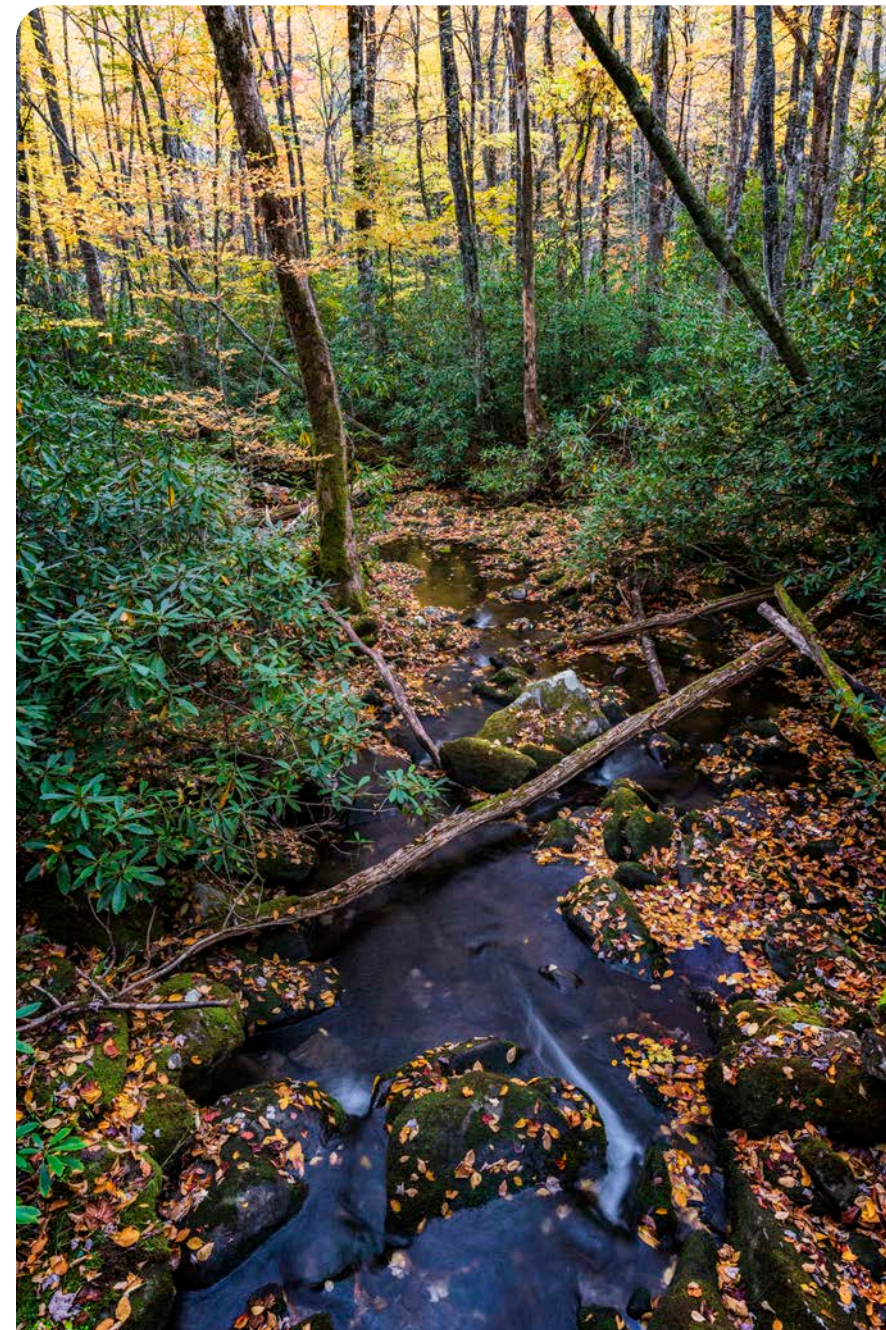
In the face of a nuclear project repeatedly shattering budget and timeline predictions, SELC and our partners helped slash utility bill increases for seniors and lower-income Georgians. Georgia Power's wasteful plan to construct new nuclear power units at Plant Vogtle led the utility to threaten outrageous customer bill increases to recoup costs from their mismanagement. After five years of relentless advocacy, our settlement with Georgia Power is expected to be approved in December, creating greater access to efficiency programs and blunting the impact of large bill increases for many customers.



VIDEO
Scan to learn about The Stitch project and its impact.

SEEING THE SOUTH

New protections for old forests



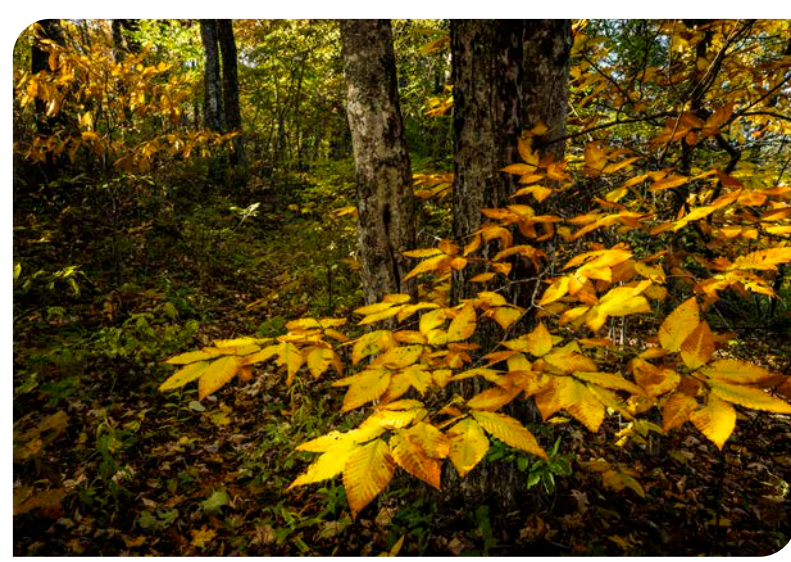
Photos by Jerry Greer

Some of the oldest trees on the East Coast tower over a corner of far west North Carolina. The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest is tucked so far into the Blue Ridge Mountains that swaths of it were never commercially logged, meaning some of its oldest, most majestic trees are 300 to 400 years old. These towering forests have provided respite for generations and inspired countless people to connect with something greater than themselves. The forest also stores centuries of carbon, blunting the impacts of climate change, and pulling more from the atmosphere each year.

While the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest is protected, other mature and old-growth forests on public lands, including many in the South, are routinely logged, releasing stored carbon to the atmosphere. Instead of cutting down these incredible forests, we should recognize their importance in the fight against climate change.







Scan to sign our petition to protect and restore old-growth forests.



Memphis polluter forced to close

By Eric Hilt

Sterilization Services of Tennessee sits in an unassuming one-story building not far from homes, parks, day care centers, and schools in Southwest Memphis. For decades, many neighbors had no idea the squat, nondescript brick facility was pumping high volumes of invisible pollution into the air.

This summer, thanks to community action bolstered by SELC's legal support, Sterilization Services of Tennessee (SST) announced it will be shuttering its polluting South Memphis facility.

It's great news but not without its caveats for residents grappling with the fact that they've been breathing this toxic air for years. This invisible threat is in addition to many that have cropped up nearby over the years, like the Valero refinery and more than a dozen other polluting facilities in this predominantly Black neighborhood.

At SST the main concern is ethylene oxide, also known as EtO, a colorless and odorless gas that increases risk for cancers, including lymphoma, leukemia, and breast cancer. The Environmental Protection Agency found that EtO is 60 times more toxic than previously understood. Last year, the agency

listed SST's South Memphis plant as one of 23 facilities that carry "elevated" cancer risks, in part because it is so close to residential areas, nursery schools, and churches.

Since then, neighbors and their supporters have been pushing hard for improvements. They got an unexpected reprieve when the company shared their plans to close "no later than April 30, 2024" in a letter to a local congressman.

"Families living near the Sterilization Services of Tennessee plant have been exposed to toxic ethylene oxide pollution for far too long. We're relieved they may soon be able to breathe easier," SELC Senior Attorney Amanda Garcia said.

"People power works"

The closure comes after months of advocacy from community members and local organizations, like Memphis Community Against Pollution and the Mallory Heights Community Development Corporation, who have pushed for the facility to either reduce the amount of ethylene oxide it releases or move out of the neighborhood.



Opposite page: Yolonda Spinks, Director of Communications for Memphis Community Against Pollution, speaks to the press about pollution in her neighborhood.

Above: The Environmental Protection Agency flagged Sterilization Services of Tennessee because its proximity to residential areas means the pollution it pumps out presents an elevated risk to public health.

"This long-overdue closure is the result of people power. When we band together, speak truth to power, and fight back against industrial polluters in our communities, justice is realized," KeShaun Pearson, president of Memphis Community Against Pollution, or MCAP, said. "People power works!"

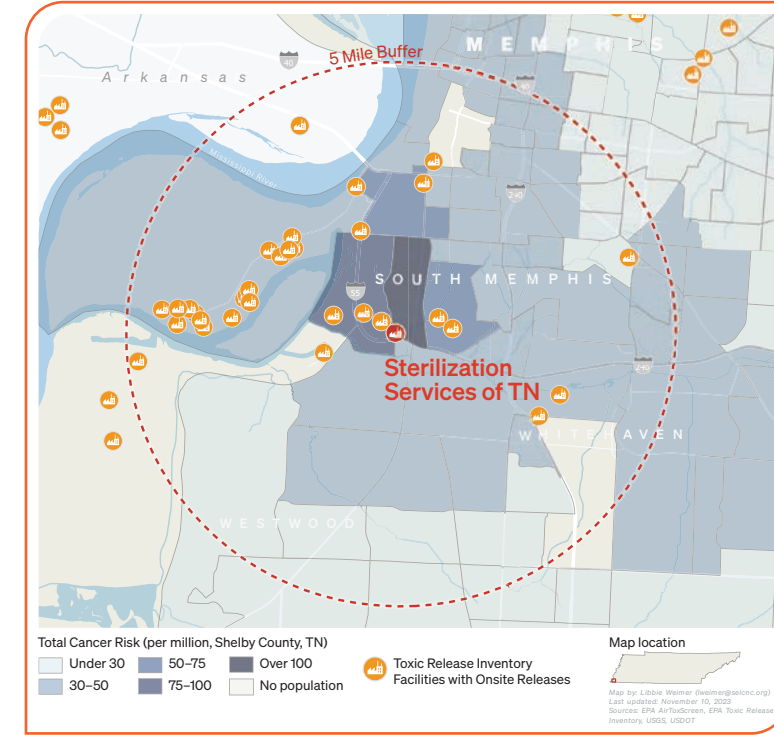
MCAP was relentless, organizing rallies, hosting community meetings, and reaching out to local leaders about the ongoing pollution. The continuous advocacy efforts pushed the Memphis City Council and Shelby County Commission to both pass resolutions urging the company to take action.

In February, SELC, on behalf of MCAP, requested that the Shelby County Health Department use its emergency powers to address Sterilization Services of Tennessee's EtO pollution. When the Health Department refused, MCAP and SELC appealed the decision.

Pollution problems persist

While news of the closure comes as a relief to communities near the plant, air pollution risks

Cancer risk near Sterilization Services of TN



continue to pose a threat in South Memphis. SST will continue releasing EtO for months and none of this addresses residents already dealing with related health impacts. Nor does it tackle the numerous other sources of air pollution concentrated in this area.

"There is an air pollution emergency right now in South Memphis, and closing Sterilization Services of Tennessee as quickly as possible is an important step in addressing pollution in this area," Garcia said.

SELC and MCAP will continue to push local leaders and industry to better protect residents of Memphis from dangerous air pollution, no matter the source. ■

"When we band together, speak truth to power, and fight back against industrial polluters in our communities, justice is realized."

— KESHAUN PEARSON, MCAP



STEVE JONES

CHANGEMAKER

Catherine Ridley

A spokesperson for sea turtles

By Samantha Baars



It's hard to imagine the successful recovery of endangered sea turtles in the South without the help of Catherine Ridley.

She has more than 20 years of experience protecting and advocating for these ancient reptiles, including her early days saving nests and hatchlings on St. Simons and Jekyll Islands, and helping launch the Georgia Sea Turtle Center in 2007. Since 2014, Ridley has spread the word about ongoing turtle conservation work — and encouraged others to take action — as the vice president of education and communications for coastal champion One Hundred Miles.

This summer, following a lawsuit from SELC on behalf of One Hundred Miles, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed to drop harmful plans related to deepening the port in Brunswick during the loggerhead nesting season. It was a huge win for recovery efforts, one Ridley celebrated with the cooperative of Georgia conservationists partnering to protect sea turtles.

“We spent time reflecting on what the victory means for all our turtles across the coast, especially the nesting mothers we’ve invested so much in for 30 years or more,” she says. “We were able to do a lot of the work on the ground, but we wouldn’t be in this position without SELC.”

Despite making tremendous progress toward recovery, Southern sea turtles are still threatened by loss of nesting habitat, pollution, vessel strikes, rising temperatures, and accidental capture by commercial fishing. Hear from Ridley about the ongoing work to protect them, plus one of her most magical memories.

How many types of turtles are there along the Southeast coast?

Five primary species can be found throughout the Southeast.

These include the loggerhead, our most common nesting species, and green sea turtles, which are nesting in increasing numbers in Florida and occasionally into Georgia. The leatherback sea turtle, the largest sea turtle species, and the Kemp’s ridley, which is the smallest and most endangered, are infrequent nesters in Georgia. The hawksbill turtle is primarily a tropical nester, and like the name implies, they have a hawk-like beak for feeding on sea sponges that live in coral reefs.

What makes the East Coast special for sea turtles?

A few things about our coast make it a great spot for nesting turtles. We have a string of protected barrier islands with relatively dark beaches that mostly haven’t been overdeveloped the way you might see along the Florida coast.

What draws you to do this work?

I still remember seeing my first loggerhead sea turtle emerging from the ocean. It was one of those micro-moments where I could see the trajectory of my life shifting.

Being even a small part of this effort is much bigger than myself, and tied to past generations of conservationists and the wildlife they helped preserve — and to the future I hope my children can have with these incredible animals. The more you feel a part of that story, the harder it is to break away from it.

Favorite Southeastern turtle species?

I probably have the biggest soft spot for the loggerhead because most of our work centers around them and I’ve been fortunate enough to meet many on our beaches.

Can you share a favorite turtle memory?

Times where it’s just me and a nesting turtle on the beach aren’t that frequent anymore, but those memories are some of my most memorable and cherished experiences of my career and life. Decades ago, I remember being on Jekyll Island alone in the dunes with a female loggerhead laying eggs. As I checked her flippers for tags to see if she had been encountered before, I brushed against some of the sand and Epibiota (organisms living on another organism) that had accumulated on her carapace. Suddenly, her shell lit up

the night sky in blue-green waves. Brushing off the bioluminescent plankton created the natural light.

How has the Endangered Species Act made a difference in sea turtle survival?

It requires that the best possible science is at the core of decision-making and establishes comprehensive recovery plans, which consider not only potential harm to the species, but also impacts to the critical habitat on which the animals rely. When dangerous issues come up that threaten them, like year-round dredging or coastal development, the ESA gives us the framework for pushing back.

And it works. Look at the tremendous progress loggerheads and other species have made in the last five decades. There’s still a lot of work left to do, but the 50th anniversary of the ESA is a good opportunity to reflect on the progress we can make when science is our guide. ■

“I still remember seeing my first loggerhead sea turtle emerging from the ocean. It was one of those micro-moments where I could see the trajectory of my life shifting.”



Ridley preps a group of volunteers to help with a turtle conservation project. Three stages of the loggerhead turtle's life: a nest, hatchling, and adult swimming.



Transforming coal mines to shared solar

By Sarah Bisacca; photos by Stu Maxey



A former coal field in southwest Virginia is now generating solar power. Opposite page: SELC's Josephus Allmond takes in the solar installation at the Wise Primary School.

Generations of coal miners have celebrated their child's first day of school at Wise Primary School in southwest Virginia. Not long ago, the school became a symbol for the region's transition to clean energy, opting for the lower costs and cleaner air that come with solar power.

Getting to that point took many years and intentional conversations in groups like the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia, where SELC is a member. Just one year after solar panel installation, the school saved nearly \$8 million in energy costs that will be reinvested into the school system. It is one of several schools in the area now tapped into the benefits of solar, an option that wasn't even available before the Solar Workgroup's efforts got underway.

Now, with that experience under folks' belts, and new funding thanks to the 2022 passage of landmark federal climate legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act, historic coal-producing states like Virginia have an unprecedented opportunity to reenergize their economy and implement environmentally sustainable solutions that work for us all.

"We know that coal can't be part of the equation if we're going to address climate change," said SELC Staff Attorney Josephus Allmond. "But that doesn't mean that communities that have been dependent on it for decades have to also be left out."

Re-energizing Southern communities

For generations, southwest Virginia produced millions of tons of coal, but production peaked in 1990. The drop in demand left coal-dependent communities facing hardships while looking to transition local economies.

"Increased investment in solar can really provide those communities with a lifeline and allow them to reclaim their economic independence," said Allmond.

Shared solar, also called community solar, can be transformational as it opens up who has access to solar power. It's the name for any solar project where the benefits flow to multiple customers.



"Increased investment in solar can really provide those communities with a lifeline and allow them to reclaim their economic independence."

— JOSEPHUS ALLMOND, STAFF ATTORNEY

The approach provides an equitable practice that efficiently and cost-effectively shares clean energy benefits with entire communities without placing a financial burden on individuals.

How is Virginia rethinking energy production?

Closed coal mines and abandoned production facilities leave behind large stretches of cleared, unused land that's ripe for clean energy alternatives. The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act affords Virginia communities an unprecedented opportunity to invest that land in community solar projects.

"On the federal level, the IRA has historic incentives for renewable energy projects that are sited on former coal mines or former coal-generating units," said Allmond. "That has an opportunity to be a really nice complement to Virginia's existing Brownfield Program."

Established in 2020, the Brownfield Program was meant to provide funds to restore and redevelop contaminated sites like former coal mines. The program

never received funding, but the IRA has the potential to change that. A combination of grants for clean energy development and massive tax incentives makes building solar facilities on former coal sites an attractive proposition for developers, who stand to save up to 60 percent of the total cost of their projects, as long as they're also sited in low-income communities.

"There's never been a better time for getting new solar projects off the ground in Virginia," says Robert Kell, the New Economy Program Manager at Appalachian Voices, based out of Norton in southwest Virginia. "We're excited to be part of transitioning the coalfields to a clean energy future with a locally rooted solar industry using disturbed mine lands and commercial sites to create jobs and economic growth."

What we're doing now

With new federal funding available, policy changes at the state level will help accelerate the transition to solar, and progress is already underway. SELC and our partners in the Solar Work Group of Southwest Virginia, including the regional grassroots group Appalachian Voices, worked together on legislation to be considered in the next General Assembly session that would expand the shared solar program into Appalachian Power Company's territory. Appalachian Power, which covers places like Wise, is the sole investor-owned utility in the state that doesn't yet allow these types of programs.

"Wherever there's room for a state-level policy that could incentivize more solar in southwest Virginia, SELC will be there trying to make that a reality," said Allmond. "I get excited about communities really embracing solar and making it work for them. They've been the energy-generation centers of the country for a long time. There isn't any reason that needs to stop, it just needs to take a new form of electricity generation." ■

VIDEO
Scan to see how Virginia's coalfields are transforming into solar farms.



MY SOUTH: FRANK HOLLEMAN

Lake Jocassee
Oconee County, South Carolina



“I’m an Oconee Bell crusader.

The Oconee Bell was the number one botanical mystery in the 19th century. There was a specimen in Paris, in a botanical museum, but no one could find it in the Americas. Asa Gray, a top botanist at Harvard, made it his passion to discover it and eventually realized folks were searching too high up; it prefers lower elevations. It’s thought to be an ancient plant and is the only shortia species in North America. It’s special and iconic, found mostly in Oconee County, where I grew up, and some in North Carolina and Georgia.”



Frank Holleman, SELC senior attorney and land conservationist, was elected in 2023 as a fellow to the American College of Environmental Lawyers for his substantial contributions to the field of environmental law, in particular his work leading to regional utilities excavating more than a quarter billion tons of coal ash and counting.

**Think big.
Act now.**



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