



Sierra Club Volunteers Mobilize to Save RIPTA Service

The stories were as different as the people who told them, but the theme was the same. Those who testified at the RIPTA public hearings on the proposed service cuts stated loudly and clearly that the cuts would make no sense and would make life very difficult for them. Those who stood up for public transportation in RI included commuters for whom bus transportation is an important convenience, elderly people who no longer own cars or drive, and a woman in a wheelchair who would lose her independence. A young veteran of the Iraq war who was disabled by a roadside bomb worried that he would be unable to get to the VA hospital, and numerous “working poor” feared they would lose their jobs due to RIPTA service cuts.

The RI Chapter Conservation Committee worked hard in many ways to make sure these voices were heard and to keep the pressure on

state officials. We distributed 3,000 postcards that included the state-wide RIPTA hearing schedule and the message “Stop the Bus Service Cuts: Keep Our Clean, Affordable Transportation Choices.” We made 350 phone calls resulting in 120 person-to-person conversations to increase turnout at the hearings.

Conservation Committee members fanned out across the state to Providence, Warwick, Barrington, Newport, and Narragansett, creating a strong Sierra Club presence at the hearings. At each hearing, we testified against RIPTA service cuts and handed out flyers with “Tips and Talking Points,” as well as copies of our recent “Fare Choice” report on public transit. Over the course of the hearings, we engaged fifty people who signed onto our mailing list of supporters. At every hearing, the RIPTA board welcomed the Sierra Club presence, and we felt a real

partnership with them toward the common goal to maintain high quality, readily-available bus service throughout the state.

Special thanks to Chris Wilhite, who wrote the script for the phone banks and attended multiple hearings; to Beth Perry, Linda Lamont, Tom Wojick, Angie Koziara, and Dick Graefe, who represented the Sierra Club at hearings; to Dick Graefe who wrote the “Tips and Talking Points” flyer, and to all who participated in the phone banks and other “behind the scenes” activities. Whew! What a blitz! But we’re not finished yet. In December, we’ll create a media event as we deliver a RIPTA bus replica to the Governor, loaded with over 100 postcards protesting the proposed service cuts. And when the legislature reconvenes in January to make transportation choices for all Rhode Islanders, the Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter will be there.

Financial Support Keeps the Club Effective in Passing Environmental Laws

By Chris Wilhite, Chapter Director

First I would like to thank every one of our members and supporters whose gifts have helped the Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter win important victories this year.

It is with a shoe-string budget of \$90,000 per year that the Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter is able to be as effective as we are. However, if we are not careful, the current economic crisis has the potential to impact our continuing effectiveness.

We believe you support the Sierra Club because we

are one of a very few environmental organizations in Rhode Island that has the ability to directly impact laws that protect the environment in the face of powerful, well-paid anti-environmental lobbyists. Between our membership dues and special gifts from our appeal letters, we generate roughly \$15,000. Because we spend 100% of this money on environmental lobbying, most gifts to the Sierra Club are not tax-deductible.



RI Chapter Executive Committee 2008

Maggie McCormick

Chapter Chair, Newsletter Editor

Barrett Hazeltine

Secretary

Tess Hart

Student Liaison

Alison Buckser

National Delegate

Beth Perry

Conservation Co-Chair

Other Chapter Leaders

Ben Jones

Political Chair

Mike Condor

Outings

Rhode Island Staff

Chris Wilhite

Chapter Director

Sierra Club RI Chapter

17 Gordon Avenue

Suite 208

Providence, RI 02905

(t) 401.521.4734

(f) 401.521.4001

www.ri.sierraclub.org

From the Chair

By Maggie McCormick

'Tis the season. For joy and peace. And hope. But this year, I can't help but feel there's more behind the renewed—and collective—sense of hope than the holidays and the start of a new year. And this sense of hope persists in spite of the deepening money crunch and inevitable cynicism about big business.

And although it's now old news, no one seems to be tired of the ideal represented by the election of Barack Obama.

Mr. Obama's imminent presidency is particularly auspicious for those of us who embrace the Sierra Club motto to "Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet." Mr. Obama has pledged to support the development of clean energy alternatives such as wind and solar power. Mr. Obama recognizes the danger of U.S. dependence on foreign fuel and the folly of "clean coal."

My wish is that the collective sense of hope now abroad in the U.S. and the world will inspire every one of us to action, whether we are veteran "activists" or new to the idea of civic involvement as a means to "be the change we wish to see in the world."

I invite you to take a first step by joining us for our 2009 Rhode Island Chapter Retreat on January 31, from noon to 4:30 p.m. at Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge in Middletown, RI. We'll begin the meeting with greeting and eating, (a nod here to Dr. Seuss), followed by a special guest speaker who will begin a dialog about the new administration's environmental agenda. Then you'll have the opportunity to attend a mini-seminar on political advocacy, writing letters to the editor, or how to host a house party to gather like-minded activists, all designed to give you tools to create change. And we'll celebrate our day together by ending with a walk around the Sachuest property.

Please join us at the retreat and throughout the year. Together we can turn hope into action.

*The Executive Committee of the Rhode Island Sierra Club
requests the honor of your presence at our Annual Retreat*

Saturday the 31st of January 2009

Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge

769 Sachuest Point Road

Middletown, RI 02842

12:00 - 1:00 - Greetings and Lunch (Hot Soup with Vegan Option)

1:00 - 1:45 - Keynote Speaker: Obama and the Environment

1:45 - 2:00 - Break

2:00 - 2:45 - Learning Sessions:

Letter Writing, Political Advocacy, How-to House Party

2:45 - 3:15 - Reflections and Closing Remarks

3:15 - 4:30 - Exploring Sachuest Point on Foot (Please wear appropriate footwear and warm clothes.)

To RSVP or for further information, including weather concerns on the day of the event, please call Maggie McCormick at (401) 855-2103.

RI Chapter Executive Committee Elections

Every Sierra Club chapter has an Executive Committee to provide guidance and leadership, in essence fulfilling the functions of a Board of Directors. The Rhode Island Chapter Executive Committee currently consists of five members, though ideally there would be nine. All members are elected by the membership of the Rhode Island Chapter. In the event of a mid-term vacancy, the seat is filled by a vote from the Executive Committee. Below is the list of candidates with biographical information. There are three candidates for four seats, as well as a place to write in a candidate. Please vote and send in the ballot by January 30th, to the Sierra Club office at 17 Gordon Ave., Suite 208, Providence, RI 02909. Call (401) 521-4734 if you have questions. Please make your voice heard.



Ben Jones

As a member of the Eastern Missouri Group Sierra Club in St. Louis, Missouri from 1994 to 2000, I had the opportunity to help the Club grow its political visibility through engagement in statewide and local

political races. I also served as Political Committee chair and on the Executive Committee for our 5,000+ member group, helping move our office into bigger and wheelchair accessible space, shepherding the Club through some tough budgetary times, implementing a staff planning and evaluation process, and entering into our first ever coalition. I also spent time working on CAFÉ standards and pro-environment candidate campaigns.

From 2000 to 2005, I stepped back from active leadership in the Sierra Club to pursue entrepreneurial interests. As board president of the Missouri Environmental Fund, I oversaw the merger with Earthshare, which included a complete revamping of the organizational bylaws. In 2005, my wife and I moved to RI and I took some time off from activism to see where my efforts might be most useful here in RI.

My primary interest in serving on the Executive Committee is to help build the Sierra Club in Rhode Island into a fiscally independent entity through both PAC and major gifts fundraising, and ultimately to have fun with the engaged and eclectic group of people I've found the Sierra Club attracts wherever I've been.



Dick Graefe

I have been involved with the Sierra Club over the past two years as an active member of the Conservation Committee, and have participated in public meetings, phone banks, a community walk, Club

leadership training, and the RIPTA public hearings. As a retired technical writer and current freelance writer/editor, I bring some important communication skills to the chapter, and recently used some of my wordsmithing skills as one of two volunteer editors of the Chapter's "Fare Choice" report on public transit. I also have board leadership experience and am the current chair of the board of South County Community Action.

I've had a life-long interest in environmental concerns as an avid reader on environmental matters and as a member of environmental preservation and conservation organizations. The Sierra Club has provided new opportunities for me. Before becoming active in the Club, I couldn't see a way to be so personally involved in the actual work of an environmental organization. At last, I have a way to use my time and talents in a team effort. And I like how the Sierra Club challenges me to become involved in new ways, especially in the advocacy and political arenas. I'm glad to be involved in focusing attention on critical environmental issues and pushing hard to raise the visibility and the priority of those issues.

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These candidates are running for the Executive Committee. Please check three names and mail this ballot by January 30, 2009 to: Sierra Club RI Chapter, 17 Gordon Ave, Suite 208, Providence, RI 02905

Membership Number (found on your address label, back page): _____

(second household member)

- Dick Graefe
- Ben Jones
- Maggie McCormick
- Write in: _____

- Dick Graefe
- Ben Jones
- Maggie McCormick
- Write in: _____

Call Chris Wilhite with any questions at (401) 521-4734.

RI Chapter Executive Committee Elections

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Maggie McCormick

My involvement with the Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter began about two years ago when I responded to a call for volunteers to help with the chapter newsletter and outings. This is my seventh edition as the editor of *Coastlines*. Since I was interested in member engagement, I also became membership chair and an outings leader, coordinating several member events and leading a series of evening walks in the summer. In January 2008, when there was a need for a new chapter chair, I

stepped into that role. I have participated in Sierra Club Diversity training, Membership Chair training, and Chapter Chair training. When Sierra Club National brought the Leadership Development Program to the RI Chapter, I participated in all three weekend workshops over the course of nine months.

While I'll be stepping down as Chapter Chair in January, I look forward to continuing on the ExCom, using all that I've learned over the past two years to further the Chapter's goals in RI. I also look forward to continuing as *Coastlines* editor and developing a more comprehensive communications strategy for the chapter.

Cheer and Loading in Rhode Island

by Ben Jones, Political Committee Chair

By now, most Sierra Club members who followed the election cycle know that the club won 23 out of 26 endorsed races.

One of the most auspicious outcomes for us was Senator Theresa Paiva-Weed becoming Senate President. Another key win was Senator Don Connors moving up to Senate Majority Leader. With a grant from the National Sierra Club, we were able to step up Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts for club members. With Chapter Director Chris Wilhite's leadership, we made contact with several hundred Club members in key districts, with emphasis on Senator Charles Levesque's re-election campaign in Bristol and Representative-Elect Mike Rice's bid for an open seat in South Kingstown. We also went door to door, making face-to-face contact with dozens more Sierra Club members in South County and on Aquidneck Island. I have no doubt that our efforts in Senator Levesque's race made the difference.

Other campaign highlights this year included RI Chapter Political Committee member Alberta Seaules' involvement with Frank Ferri's campaign in Warwick. Alberta's concern about the fact that she was having "fun" volunteering for the campaign underscored what civic engagement should be. Helping good environmentalists get elected is fun, especially in a state as small as Rhode Island.

While we were discouraged by the loss of Republican State House Representative Bruce Long in Middletown/ Jamestown to Democrat Deb Ruggiero, the good news is that Representative-Elect Ruggiero is a

long-time Sierra Club ally and is emphasizing the environment as she takes office.

This is my first legislative and electoral cycle since moving to Rhode Island, and chapter members and leaders have re-invigorated my passion for environmental politics. I'm especially looking forward to seeing the difference The Sierra Club can make in the legislative cycle this year, with some new friends gained and other relationships cemented as a result of the important election work and subsequent votes cast by Sierra Club members.

In preparing for the 2010 Gubernatorial election, we will be raising Political Action Committee (PAC) funds, with a goal of having \$25,000 in the bank by June filings in 2010. With money available to hire additional staff organizers, the Club's active ranks are certain to grow alongside our visibility. Our ability to impact environmental legislation is directly related to our ability to hold legislators accountable to voters like you who care about the environment. We hope to continue to grow both the electoral and legislative power of the RI Chapter for years to come.

If you are interested in election politics and want to get involved through the Sierra Club, the Political Committee is looking for volunteers to join us at a lobby day to be scheduled this spring--your presence will add to our impact. Please contact me, Ben Jones, via e-mail, ben@leftbrain.net, or via phone, 401-598-6639, to learn more about how you can help.

Donations Keep the RI Chapter Effective

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The Rhode Island Chapter does have a charitable trust through the Sierra Club Foundation for tax-deductible gifts. For example, the Prince Charitable Trusts has been an important donor to the Sierra Club's environmental education program on transportation choices. While tax-deductible gifts benefit our environmental education programs, they *cannot* be used to lobby decision-makers.

The Bottom Line

The Sierra Club Rhode Island Chapter needs the continued support of our members and supporters – especially in the form of those grassroots lobbying dollars. Our work--advocating for strong environmental laws that will cut global warming pollution, protect open spaces, and give Rhode Island greater energy independence and transportation choices is done with only \$15,000. We need more than that.

Time to Double-Up

Please help the Sierra Club double our lobbying budget this year. With \$30,000, the Sierra Club could spend much more time mobilizing our members and the public to put direct pressure on state legislators in order to get good laws passed. In addition to monetary contributions, if you'd like to donate some of your time to our fundraising effort, please call me, Chris Wilhite, at the Chapter office on weekdays at (401) 521-4734, or e-mail me, chris.wilhite@sierraclub.org. You can also pledge a gift online at www.ri.sierraclub.org/pledge

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Coastlines is going paperless. For the environment and for the economy. Following the Spring 2009 issue, you will no longer receive *Coastlines* in your USPS mailbox; it will be sent to you electronically. Please call, e-mail or write the RI Sierra Club office with your e-mail address and we will send you the newsletter electronically. We will not use e-mail addresses provided in this context for any other purpose.

OUTINGS

WHERE WE'RE GOING: 3rd Annual Rome Point Seal Watch (North Kingstown)

Outings leader Mike Condor once again hosts a RI Sierra Club favorite. Come see the Harbor Seals as they winter down in Narragansett Bay. This is one of the best places and times to spot the seals! The walk out and back is about 2.5 miles over easy terrain, which can be wet or icy depending upon the weather. Sturdy walking shoes are a must. Hat, gloves, and refreshments are recommended. Bring your binoculars or spotting scope for optimal viewing, though you can see the seals without either.

Meet at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 21, 2009. From the north, take RI 1A through Wickford into the village of Hamilton. The entrance lane is 1.7 miles from a traffic light at Fairway Drive. From the south, the lane is just over 0.5 mile from RI 138. The gated lane runs to the east. There is a new parking area at the entrance to the gated lane.



Jacob, a Sierra Club Outings Leader-In-Training, practices his photography skills at Parker Woodlands.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN Parker Woodlands Audubon Refuge (Coventry)

October 25th was a glorious fall hiking day in the Parker Woodlands Audubon Refuge. Many of the trees were bare, but the beeches still held onto their golden leaves. We practiced making whistles out of acorn tops, much to the delight of the young and young at heart. Further on down the trail we crossed a bridge and explored Turkey Meadow Brook. And we all agreed that Parker Woodlands is a great place to take pictures.



Sierra Club/Rhode Island Chapter
17 Gordon Avenue
Suite 208
Providence, RI 02905

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