

RIVER VOICES

WATER EQUITY AND
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

April 2017 Issue

A RIVER NETWORK PUBLICATION

CLICK THE BLUE
LINKS WITHIN
THIS NEWSLETTER
TO DIG DEEPER
ON THE TOPICS.



After over ten years of having arsenic-polluted water flowing in their schools, students in Arvin, CA celebrate Agua4All fountains with point-of-use filters.



Community Water Center staff and community partners registered people to vote last fall as part of an integrated voter engagement program that provides opportunities for individuals to engage in water justice campaigns during and between elections.



HEADQUARTERS

P.O. Box 21387
Boulder, CO 80308
303.736.2724
info@rivernetwork.org
www.rivernetwork.org

MISSION, VISION, AND FOCUS

River Network empowers and unites people and communities to protect and restore rivers and other waters that sustain all life. We envision a future of clean and ample water for people and nature, where local caretakers are well-equipped, effective and courageous champions for our rivers. Our three strategies for focused investment are strong champions, clean water, and ample water.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Building Power for Water Justice in California's San Joaquin Valley**
by Jenny Rempel and Susana De Anda
- 7 Detroiters' Fight for Affordable Water Access Has Lessons for America's Future**
by Monica Lewis-Patrick
- 10 Green Leaders Step Into Electoral Politics**
by Diana Toledo
- 14 Uniting a Rural Community Against a Pipeline**
by Nancy Sorrells
- 17 Additional Resources for Civic Engagement**

Cover photo © Water Foundation



Community members turn out for “Hands Across the Land”, an event to highlight the extraordinary views from the Blue Ridge Parkway and Appalachian Trail at risk from the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Credit: Augusta County Alliance

IN THIS ISSUE

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was drafted a few years after the end of World War II. It laid out, for the first time, fundamental human rights for all people. It remains a massively important document. However, missing from the declaration was the right to water.

Over the past 20 years, a series of resolutions and comments passed by the United Nations and its committees have slowly yet steadily addressed this gap. The human right to water is now considered indispensable for leading a life in human dignity as well as a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights. In short, everyone should have the right to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

Globally, studies estimate 60% of the population in low-income countries cannot afford water needed for daily living. Although you might assume this to be a problem exclusive to developing countries, here in the United States water is quickly becoming unaffordable too. A recent study from Michigan State University found that water and sewer utility costs are rising far faster than inflation, suggesting that water will be unaffordable to 35% of our population within five years.¹ From Detroit to Denver, Flint to Fresno, access to affordable clean water and healthy rivers is not equal.

We believe that access to affordable clean water and healthy rivers is a fundamental human right. Like other human rights, we must be prepared to assert and defend this right. By listening, we can hear the concerns of the communities we are part of; and by working together, we can influence elected officials and resource managers to address these disparities. The articles in this issue of River Voices provide examples of places where access to affordable clean water is not equal, and how civic engagement is making a difference. These articles underscore the variety of ways to become involved, including seeking public office. We hope that this issue sparks your curiosity and encourages you to continue exploring. Water is life. **Thank you contributors!**

HERE ARE A FEW OTHER IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT RIVER NETWORK:

- Attend **River Rally 2017** from May 8–11 in Grand Rapids, MI to learn, celebrate, and get inspired.
- Register for May 18 webinar: **The What, Why and How of Relevancy, Equity, Inclusion and Diversity**
- Register for June 1 webinar: **Grappling with Unconscious Bias for More Inclusive Water Protection and Restoration**
- Support us through your **donations** and become a **member** or renew your membership
- Participate in our annual trends survey and strategic planning requests (coming soon)

We hope to see you at Grand Rapids this May.

Nicole Silk, President
River Network

¹ *A Burgeoning Crisis? A Nationwide Assessment of the Geography of Water Affordability in the United States*, Elizabeth A. Mack and Sarah Wrase, 2017

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a bright pink top and a tan jacket, stands in a vast orchard of young trees. She is smiling and holding up a clear glass of water towards the camera. The orchard rows stretch far into the distance under a clear sky.

BUILDING POWER FOR WATER JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA'S SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

*by Jenny Rempel, Director of Education & Engagement and
Susana De Arda, Co-Executive Director & Co-Founder, Community Water Center*

Sandra Garcia is a long-time water justice activist who registered voters across the San Joaquin Valley this past fall.

In California's San Joaquin Valley, many families are forced to rely on bottled water for drinking and cooking—and some have had to do so for more than a decade. At Community Water Center, we work to ensure all Californians have access to safe, clean, and affordable drinking water. To achieve that vision, our organization acts as a catalyst for community-driven water solutions through organizing, education, and advocacy.

CALIFORNIA'S DRINKING WATER CRISIS

Each year, more than one million Californians are served water that does not meet safe drinking water standards, violating their right to safe, clean, and affordable drinking water. Indeed, this is a moral right. And since 2012, it has also been recognized by the state of California as a legal right. Yet in the sixth largest economy in the world, many small, rural, low-income, communities of color are excluded from the drinking water services that other Californians take for granted.

Arsenic and nitrate are two of the most frequently occurring contaminants impacting water systems. Peer-reviewed studies from UC Berkeley found that drinking water polluted with these contaminants is

disproportionately found in low-income and Latino communities. So, similar to Flint, Michigan, it is low-income communities and communities of color that bear the brunt of California's drinking water crisis. This is not only an issue of racial and environmental injustice, it is an economic injustice. Residents in these communities can spend as much as 10% of their income on drinking water alone, often having to pay for bottled water in addition to paying high water bills for contaminated water they cannot drink.

These same communities are on the front lines of the extreme weather caused by climate change. They have been hit hardest by the water scarcity brought on by recent droughts, further exposing drinking water vulnerabilities. Almost 13,000 Californians have suffered from well failures—many of them experiencing complete household water loss due to drought-related groundwater overdraft. As with water quality, the individuals most vulnerable to water reliability challenges live in communities that either lack centralized water systems or have only one or two wells that are compromised by intensified and unregulated groundwater pumping to meet the needs of agriculture.

COMMUNITY WATER CENTER

Community Water Center (CWC) was founded ten years ago when mothers from low-income, rural farmworking communities complained of brown tap water that smelled like sewage. They worried about finding safe water for cooking and about their children not having safe water to drink at school. Schools were sealing off faucets with caution tape and spending their limited budgets on bottled water. Local water boards were refusing to translate their meetings into Spanish, even in communities that were over 90% Latino where nearly a third of residents were Spanish-only speakers.

In this context, CWC was founded by a community organizer and a lawyer who realized that the problems faced by many communities struggling to obtain safe, clean, and affordable drinking water were not isolated. Rather, they represented a landscape of unsafe and unjust water conditions extending across the Central Valley.

In the past decade, we have worked alongside residents to organize and advocate for changes from the local to the state level. Together, we advocated successfully for the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the Proposition One Water Bond, which allocated over half a billion dollars in new state funding to small communities' drinking water needs. And in 2012, after years of organizing and advocacy, the State of California became the only US state to adopt the Human Right to Water (Water Code 106.3), recognizing that "every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes."

We have made a lot of progress together with communities since our founding ten years ago, but too many Californians are still dealing with unsafe, unaffordable, or unreliable water. Despite increased investment in community drinking water projects, many communities are still waiting for solutions.



Thousands of residents completely lost their household water supply during the recent drought and lived out of bottles, buckets, and tanks. Some homes still remain without running water even after a record wet winter.



A child's plea to a visiting representative of the UN Human Rights Council who visited Seville, CA in 2011 to evaluate the community's water system.



CWC works alongside community leaders to advance both interim and lasting drinking water solutions.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND POWER BUILDING

A key barrier to securing the Human Right to Water in the small, rural, low-income communities of the Central Valley is the lack of elected officials who are responsive and accountable to the communities they represent. In an effort to shift political power and elect officials who will be accountable to community needs, CWC has established leadership development programs as well as an integrated voter engagement program that combines ongoing campaign organizing with civic engagement.

Since its founding, CWC has understood the importance of developing strong local water board leaders. Local water boards include community services districts, public utilities districts and nonprofit mutual benefit corporations, all of which are governed by volunteer community members. These boards are responsible for providing drinking water to hundreds of thousands of Central Valley residents and play an integral role in sustaining healthy, thriving rural communities.

Over the years, CWC has worked with 50 local water boards and community-based organizations struggling to manage efficient and accountable water systems in their communities. We have worked with many local leaders who started as concerned residents and became local and regional elected officials. Unfortunately, board members sometimes lack the resources, information and support they need to be successful, and small boards are all too often left out of the decision-making processes that are critical to ensuring their communities have access to safe, affordable water. Last year, CWC launched the Community Water Leaders Network to support local board members in the San Joaquin Valley through information sharing and capacity building.

In addition, CWC has invested in integrated voter engagement to help communities realize their political power. For example, we have been working with the community of Orosi (in Tulare County), where we estimate the 937 registered voters represent only about half of all residents that are eligible to vote. Increasing civic engagement in local water board and other local, state, and federal elections and decisions begins with registering these naturalized, voting-age citizens.

Increasing voter turnout in these communities can sway the outcome of an election. For example, the last water board election in Orosi was won by

a mere 33 votes. In nearby Cutler, California, the winner of the most recent public utility district election was elected by a two-vote margin. CWC has been engaging voters since our founding, and we ran our first voter registration drive in 2010. In 2016, we registered over 700 San Joaquin Valley residents to vote and we are now following up with these residents about opportunities to engage in our water justice campaigns.

Just as important is encouraging local community members to run for local water board positions. When there are no candidates on the election ballot, as happened in the communities of East Orosi and Poplar in 2015, the county appoints individuals to serve on the local water boards. For this reason, CWC's integrated voter engagement work is complementary to our strategy of building residents' capacity to serve on local water boards.

Integrated voter engagement refers to organizing and civic engagement activities that enable us to build a movement of people who: 1) care about water justice, 2) are willing to take action for water justice, 3) vote in every election, and, most importantly, 4) keep caring, acting, and voting until their communities have secured the human right to water.

To deliver on the promise of the human right to water, we need strong local leadership that is engaged in water decision-making. We have a drinking water crisis on our hands in California, and civic engagement is key to achieving water justice.

LEARN MORE:

- [*Are We Providing Our School Kids Safe Drinking Water? An Analysis of California Schools Impacted by Unsafe Drinking Water*](#)
- [**CWC Guide to Community Drinking Water Advocacy**](#)
- "Is My Water Safe? A Guide on Finding Out What Is In Your Water and How to Protect Yourself from Unsafe Water" ([English](#)/[Español](#))
- To join the water justice movement, sign up for CWC's monthly [**water justice newsletter**](#)



DETROITERS' FIGHT FOR AFFORDABLE WATER ACCESS HAS LESSONS FOR AMERICA'S FUTURE

by *Monica Lewis-Patrick, M.A.L.S.*
President & CEO, We the People of Detroit

Access to water is essential to human life and health. Yet, an increasing number of people in this country are unable to afford water and sewer services for their homes. With water and sewer utility costs rising far faster than inflation, a [recent study from Michigan State University](#) finds that water could be unaffordable for 35% of the United States population within five years. Water affordability has reached a crisis level in many communities, including Detroit, Michigan, where aging infrastructure, a declining population, and rising water costs have led the utility to shut off water service to tens of thousands of residents unable to pay their water bills.

The mass shutoffs started in the wake of Detroit's 2014 bankruptcy, and they continue unabated, with no provisions for vulnerable populations such as pregnant and nursing women, children, elderly, disabled or chronically ill individuals. The causes and consequences of Detroit's water shutoffs represent a novel form of water insecurity emerging in 'post-industrial' cities of North America. Detroit residents have taken a novel approach to address the crisis and envision a future with more equitable access to water.

We the People of Detroit is a grassroots organization founded in 2008 and dedicated to community coalition building and providing vehicles that inform, train, and mobilize the citizens of Detroit to improve their quality of life. Our approach to the water affordability crisis merges research with action and empowerment for a more secure water future.

In 2014, during the initial wave of water shutoffs, We the People of Detroit served as the on-the-ground coordinator for the **People's Water Board Coalition**.

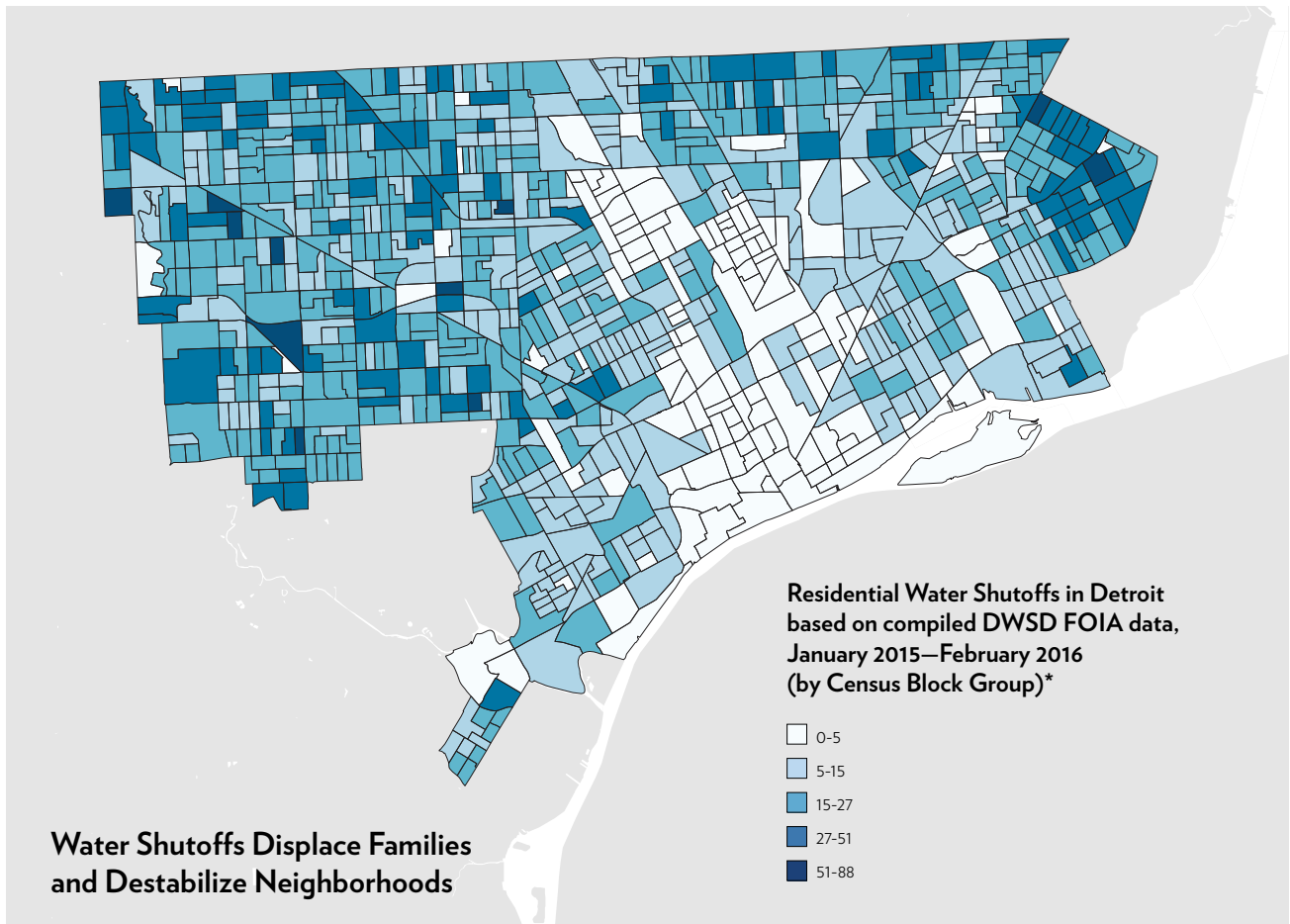
This coalition, which had 38 member organizations at the time, has since grown to more than 50 community-based and grassroots organizations.

We the People of Detroit Community Research Collective (WTP-CRC) is a collaboration of community activists, academics, researchers, and designers, producing research with and for the citizens of Detroit around the social consequences of austerity policies in Detroit, including policies that impact equitable access to water. Our group was created to use science to serve the community and to be able to counter the narrative that it's okay to deny people access to water.

Our volunteers continue to conduct door-to-door canvassing and distribute "Water=Life" kicker cards. We also manage a water rights hotline for people who need emergency assistance, oversee Water Stations, and on an emergency basis, even deliver water to folks who cannot make it to a station.



Taking it to the Streets' canvassing ©We the People of Detroit



© We the People of Detroit

IS UNAFFORDABLE ACCESS TO WATER MAKING DETROIT SICK?

Our latest project aims to address the lack of access to safe and affordable water for residents of the City of Detroit, and in particular investigates the relationship between water insecurity and health. This project has also been challenged by the lack of information on the scale and scope of the shutoffs, while empowering community members with applicable research skills and educating Detroiters at large about the impacts of these policies on their neighborhoods and their health.

To address the impacts of water insecurity of this nature, a two-fold approach was designed in collaboration with academic and community partners of We the People of Detroit’s Community Research Council (CRC).

(1) QUANTITATIVE CITY-WIDE HEALTH

ASSESSMENT: From 2015-2016, Nadia Gaber, a MD/PhD candidate at the University of California San Francisco, led an effort to create a baseline picture of health needs among Detroiters utilizing the Centers for Disease Control’s CASPER toolkit

for post-disaster health needs assessment. This rapid, reliable and inexpensive methodology has allowed WPD to conduct a city-wide assessment of chronic vulnerability amongst Detroiters, as well as acute effects of water disconnections. It will serve as a baseline picture of public health that will inform targeted research on hospital admissions due to water shutoffs being conducted through our partnership with Henry Ford Health System Global Health Initiative.

(2) QUALITATIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL

ASSESSMENTS: To capture the fine-grained experiences of community members living amidst multiple, complex barriers to health, we conducted a qualitative research component focused on residents’ challenges accessing water as well as the resources they mobilize when faced with persistent disconnection from public water infrastructure. This semi-structured interview includes a 10-part questionnaire to test the association between residents’ self-reported water insecurity and the Falk Self-Reporting Questionnaire, a measure of psychosocial distress.

To conduct the surveys, we trained over forty community members in the ethics and methods of public health research, and we continue to welcome support to ensure rigorous analysis of all of the data collected. We self-organized and fundraised in order to collect this data, but we continue to seek funds in order to complete and disseminate the results of our research.

The last phase of this project involves a plan to host Town Hall meetings in the communities surveyed in order to report back on our findings and empower residents to use this knowledge to advocate and create solutions for safe and affordable water in the city of Detroit. This multi-systemic model will capture both a representative baseline of the city-wide health needs in the wake of financial disaster and a robust picture of the impacts amongst the most vulnerable sector of Detroiters.

We all deserve to live in communities that are healthy and whole. Unfortunately, the reality for tens of thousands of Detroiters is that we have to fight for basic human rights, including the right to safe, clean, and affordable access to water. Our ultimate goal as it relates to water is that everyone will have this basic human right.

LEARN MORE:

- [A Burgeoning Crisis? A Nationwide Assessment of the Geography of Water Affordability in the United States](#), Elizabeth A. Mack and Sarah Wrase, 2017
- [United Nations Rapporteur for Water & Sanitation and Affordable Housing](#)
- [Henry Ford Health Systems Global Health Initiative research, commissioned by and with We the People of Detroit: Community Research Collective](#)
- [We the People of Detroit and MSU Water Testing Project–DETROIT](#)
- [Link to We the People of Detroit's Detroit Water Rights Hotline](#)



Actor Mark Ruffalo joins local Detroit residents at a rally demanding affordable access to clean water. © We the People of Detroit

GREEN LEADERS STEP INTO ELECTORAL POLITICS

by Diana Toledo, Leadership Development Director, River Network

The question of how civic engagement levels are changing in society is under constant study by social researchers and nonprofits. And the current diagnosis is that while the ethos of service remains strong in our culture—younger generations are volunteering at higher rates than their parents²—many Americans have lost trust in our political institutions and in citizens' ability to influence the decisions that impact their lives.

In her 2015 report *Understanding America's "Interested Bystander"; A Complicated Relationship with Civic Duty*, social researcher Kate Krontiris found that 48.9% of the US adult population are what she describes as "interested bystanders." These individuals value civic engagement and are informed on issues, but find it difficult to publicly voice their opinions or take action. Krontiris points to the political nature of civic engagement as one reason behind this phenomenon. Interested bystanders associate political activity with conflict, and while they are drawn to activities that build community and social connections (e.g. volunteering or raising money for a cause), they avoid organizing or campaigning activities. By building bridges that help move people from a "service" to a "civics" orientation, our organizations can grow our base of supporters and raise the profile of the issues we care about.

The nonprofit sector, however, attracts individuals who are already oriented toward public service and civic engagement. River and watershed leaders are generally comfortable taking action to influence policies and organizing others to do the same. Some leaders have taken their work to the next level of civic engagement—running for elected office. In this article, we turn to four such leaders to learn about what inspired them, what they have learned along the way, and what advice they have for others considering electoral politics.



Name: Jason Frenzel, Stewardship Coordinator of Huron River Watershed Council (MI)

Office: Appointed to fill a vacancy in the Ann Arbor City Council in 2016, having previously run as a candidate. Currently running for re-election.

What inspired you to run? Ann Arbor is a fairly liberal town but it hasn't had strong environmentalists (in office) in over 25 years. With the economic downturn of the past 10 years, the city saw a significant loss of staffing and expertise in human services, the environment and the arts. I wanted to start the conversation about restoring those community values.... I had also worked in the City Parks Department for 10 years before joining HRWC and saw ways the system wasn't working efficiently. Finally, through my work on local food initiatives, we would routinely invite elected officials to things and get a low turnout. I realized, "what if I were that person in this conversation?" There was a vacancy... and I could fill it.

Did your work in conservation help or hinder your campaign? And vice-versa... how did your electoral campaign work help or hinder your conservation work? My background was quite advantageous in terms of understanding a set of issues that are significant... to our community. Recreation is very important... our parks are strongly supported. Having intimate knowledge of those things was quite valuable (and) I could speak to those issues in a passionate and knowledgeable way.

Words of advice for someone considering running? Get involved early, get a few years in politics. That might be through serving on a board or commission, some additional service, or through the political party. Get exposed to how the environmental work happens in the city by going to lots of meetings and see if you like it.... Develop a wide array of background and experience.... What came home to roost for me... (was) that finding a solution that just fixes the waterway is not as good as finding a solution that also addresses two other issues... being aware of how that works is very helpful.

Biggest surprise of the job? The workload is heavy.... I have less control in how the work plays out and I'm not the master of my schedule. Also, the psychological reworking related to the gravity of the decisions we're making in the long-term was surprising... that I am one of 11 people deciding how our city grows, what ethics it embodies. On the upside, I like being a public servant. The issues are large, small, neighborhood scale, region-wide—all sort of opportunities to help all sorts of people. The opportunity to move forward things that are deeply ingrained in our community's ethic... the sense of satisfaction that comes with that is extremely rich and deep.

Has your experience provided you new insights into the role citizens can play with decision-makers? All the things we talk about as advocates—write your representative, send letters, etc.—also works at the local level. And something that's overlooked—there are a lot of ways to get involved civically. Get out the vote, register voters, be a voice of reason between disparate parties, go to meetings,... incrementally, these things make a difference. If we don't have people interested in conservation working at all these levels, conservation won't proliferate. We need people in the state legislature, at the town commission, in the planning commission... especially at a time where we have such a black and white view of reality. And voting, just do it. Vote.



Name: Michael Helfrich, Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper (PA). Stepping off in Spring 2017.

Office: Serving as member of York City Council since 2012; Council President since 2016. Currently running for York City Mayor.

What inspired you to run? I was asked. I was already active in the community, attending city council meetings, speaking up on issues in a public way. A friend was stepping off the Council and they wanted a strong independent voice to stand as check and balance to a strong Mayor. I lost the primary but it was very close, so I decided to run a write in campaign and got 40% of the voters to write-in my name. I became the first write-in for a major public office in the modern history of York City and defeated my opponent by 3 votes.

Did your work in conservation help or hinder your campaign? And did your electoral work help or hinder your conservation work? Through my conservation work I was very oppositional to a local plant processing incinerator ash. I was very vocal at City Council and was told I was taking their jobs away, but people knew my work was coming from a place of doing good. I always said I am doing this for people, not the owls or the fish. I bring it back to conservation by raising issues people care about—your ability to go fishing with your grandson. People saw I was doing good things for the community. I don't feel my elected position hindered my conservation work. This is a very Republican part of the state but I keep myself very policy oriented—not political—so having an official title gives me some more credibility and gets me invited to a few more meetings.

Words of advice for someone considering running?

At my second River Rally, I did a presentation called “Be Helpful, Be Friendly, Be Right: How to Work with Elected Officials”. The gist of it is, if you want to get on someone’s good side, be helpful. Do cleanups, do things they can take credit for. Some people don’t want you to be helpful, so continue to be friendly. Some aren’t friendly, so be right. It’s the only thing you’ve got. If you want to maintain the relationship, you have to be friendly and be helpful.... If you want to be in it for the long term, make as few enemies as possible.

Has your experience provided you new insights into the role citizens can play with decision-makers?

Some people forget basic relationship building skills when talking with an elected official. Be respectful of their time... come in, be succinct, and bring a solution if possible. Don’t be the 200th person to tell me (about a problem), be the person that brings me a solution. In the conservation world, our opponents—big lobbying firms for industry groups—come to elected officials with written legislation for how that legislator can solve their problem. You’ll get more respect if you come with solutions than if you come with complaints.



Name: Julie Mayfield, Executive Director of Mountain True (NC)

Office: Serving as a member of the Asheville City Council since 2015

What inspired you to run? As a lawyer and policy advocate for 25 years, I have spent my entire adult life trying to influence decision-makers and asking them to make the decisions I want them to make. I finally

decided it was time for me to become one of those people so that I could make and influence policy from the inside rather than the outside. Another... reason is that Asheville is facing challenges that my career as an environmental advocate has prepared me to tackle.

Did your work in conservation help or hinder your campaign?

My work... was an enormous benefit to me in the campaign. I’m not sure I would have been elected without it. My work has taken me into many neighborhoods and communities and enabled me to sit around tables with many different kinds of people.... Those connections were enormously useful because those people were able to talk about me to their friends and colleagues.... Likewise, [it] enabled me to seek endorsements from elected officials and other community leaders. Asheville is also a very progressive and environmentally aware city. Having solid environmental credentials and having led high profile environmental campaigns gave me credibility with many voters.... My work has [also] given me expertise on issues key to Asheville’s future success. Finally, because of this work, I understand how to work with people—many of whom are angry at you, don’t like you, make assumptions about you, etc. It’s been my job for over 20 years to figure out a way forward with people I disagree with and make progress. That is what governing is all about.

Words of advice for others considering running?

If you have competition, the campaign takes an enormous amount of time, organizational ability, and resources. You will need people and money... and time for events, door knocking, phone calling... and preparing on the issues. You should also do it only if you’re serious about governing. That is also hard work and takes a lot of time to do right. I am on or the council liaison to 13 other boards and commissions, most of whom meet monthly. Then there’s all the other work as you identify priorities, move them forward... etc. But if you love government and people, if you have the time and resources, and if you have support from your family and friends, then BY ALL MEANS RUN!

Biggest surprise of the job? Perhaps the biggest surprise is how easy it has been to move my priorities forward with my colleagues... I have not encountered the level of competition among priorities that I anticipated.

Most unlikely stakeholders? Oddly enough, with MountainTrue having been in litigation with Duke Energy for five years on coal ash pollution and engaged in an aggressive 3-year campaign to close their Asheville coal plant, I now count Duke Energy as an ally in our local efforts to reduce energy

use and avoid additional fossil fuel infrastructure here. In my role on city council, I co-chair a task force with a Duke Energy official and the chair of the county commission...and together we are leading our community toward a cleaner energy future through a nationally unique partnership.

Your proudest moment? Probably the most was when DOT selected as its preferred alternative for a major highway project the alternative that the city and community had been advocating for close to 10 years. A true victory for me personally and the Asheville community.



Name: Amy Beatie, Executive Director of Colorado Water Trust

Office: Candidate for Colorado House of Representatives District 4

What inspired you to run? November 9, 2016. Plain and simple. I woke up the morning after Election Day and said to myself “well nothing’s holding me back now.” I grew into my adulthood in this community... bought my first house, started my first job... met my husband...gave birth to my son. But over my time here, I have seen incredible change in my community. And it has had impacts on everyone who loves [it]. (One day) I arrived home and realized that the last local low-cost grocery store in my community was going out of business, and our community was already a food desert for many. We’re seeing intense

development pressure and sky-rocketing home prices. People on fixed incomes are being pressured out of their homes by the increased taxes. Put simply: people are getting left behind. [Now] is the time to give back to this place that has meant so much to me, and make it even better: a place that maintains its cultural and economic diversity, that balances the needs of its old and new residents, and above all else works to meet the basic needs of its families for affordable housing, environmental justice, and quality public education.

Words of advice for others considering running?

One can always wait for the perfect time in life for everything, and running is no different. When is the perfect time to run for office—the perfect seat, with the perfect circumstances, the perfect ability to fundraise, etc.? No time! One must simply take that first step.... It’s the more unlikely people to run that will bring new ideas and problem-solving skills to the table, who will be willing to change the rules, and re-work the system. The other thing I would suggest is signing up for trainings on how to run. There are some amazing programs out there!

Do you plan to continue to serve in your conservation role while in office?

In order to run an effective campaign that will allow me to meet as many voters as possible and be as available as I possibly can, I’m actually leaving my job. This was a very tough decision... [but] in the end, the clean break seemed to be the best strategy for all for so many reasons.

LEARN MORE:

- Many organizations provide training and actively recruit individuals considering running for office. Most target individuals by their politics or specific identities (e.g. women, African-Americans, LGBTQ, veterans, immigrants, etc.) They include [Democracy for America](#), [Democratic African American Women’s Caucus](#), [emergeAmerica](#), [Emily’s List](#), [National Democratic Training Committee](#), [National Federation of Republican Women](#), [New American Leaders Project](#), [Progressive Change Campaign Committee](#), [She Should Run](#), [Veterans Campaign](#), [Victory Institute](#), [Wellstone](#).
- Check your local Sierra Club and League of Conservation Voters chapters for trainings for pro-environment candidates.

²Millenials Civic Health Index, National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, Harvard University’s Institute of Politics, and Mobilize.org. 2013.



UNITING A RURAL COMMUNITY AGAINST A PIPELINE

by Nancy Sorrells

Co-chair, Augusta County Alliance, part of the Shenandoah Valley Network

Opposition to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline has helped create unlikely alliances, bringing together residents of rural, conservative communities with more traditional environmental groups.

It was the spring of 2014. Rumors of a proposed 42-inch, high-pressure natural gas pipeline began to circulate in the Shenandoah Valley. Details were sketchy, but within a few weeks Virginia's most powerful utility company, Dominion, had scheduled a meeting with the local Augusta County Board of Supervisors to tell them the "good news" regarding "an economic boon" that was headed their way. Jobs, tax dollars, cleaner air, and cheap electricity galore would be their reward for welcoming this utility project into the county.

Barely mentioned was the fact that it would be a transmission pipeline passing through the county on its way from West Virginia to North Carolina, not a line to which households or local businesses could connect. Underneath the official message, Dominion's implied message was "By the way, you had better like it because you can't stop us." After all, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) ultimately could grant them eminent domain authority to take private property for the project, and a 2004 Virginia General Assembly Act gave them the right to survey private land without permission.

Virginia's Governor Terry McAuliffe announced his support. He told Virginians that the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline was a potential game-changer. He was right about the pipeline's potential to be a game-changer. Just not in the way that Dominion and the Governor would have us believe.

And that is how a group of local farmers, environmentalists, neighbors, lawyers and former elected officials found ourselves sitting around a county farmhouse dining room table in the Shenandoah Valley, all trying to educate ourselves on the pipeline and its potential consequences. It was not long before we created the Augusta County Alliance under the umbrella of the region-wide non-profit Shenandoah Valley Network.

Three years later we find ourselves informed and empowered, at the heart of what is shaping up to be one of the biggest David-and-Goliath showdowns on the East Coast. Dominion's 600-mile pipeline, which we now understand is a redundant fuel supply not needed to meet domestic energy demands, is proposed to run through a



“Pipeline Air Force” pilots have volunteered to fly banners and help reporters and photographers capture images of landscapes and streams that would be impacted by the pipeline.

rich landscape of historic family farms, steep, rugged mountain terrain in the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests, and almost 2,000 stream and wetland crossings. And while the Augusta County Alliance has been flexible enough to learn and grow and mold our message as the stakes get higher, we maintain certain core ideas.

AUGUSTA COUNTY ALLIANCE: A CONSERVATIVE VOICE FOR LAND AND WATER RIGHTS

From the beginning, Dominion has claimed that the resistance to this pipeline springs from a few tree huggers. Nothing could be farther from the truth, particularly in Augusta County. The county is the second largest in the state and home to a mix of highly productive family farms and successful manufacturing. And, although the two cities of Staunton and Waynesboro tend slightly to the left during state and national elections, the county runs as high as 70 percent Republican. A land filled with tree huggers it is not. But it is a place filled with hard-working, independent people who respect the land, love their special spot on earth, and don't take kindly to others telling them what to do with it. Underneath that land arise the headwaters of the Shenandoah and James Rivers, a powerful and fragile resource that flows into the drinking water supply for Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Va., and eventually into the Chesapeake Bay. The people of Augusta County understand the fragility of the “swiss cheese” karst topography beneath their feet and know how easily water supplies can be altered and contaminated.

Clearly, then, **decision number one at the farmhouse planning session was to stay true to the local values and messages of the communities we represent.** The struggle in Augusta County has never been a strictly environmental one. It is a conservative message about property rights, including the right to clean drinking water.

Soon those folks sitting at the table added more people to their ranks. Some were from the far right, some from the far left, and most were middle of the road. They were from vastly diverse economic and age backgrounds, but they were all from the “party of Augusta County,” and, as one elected leader said, “we aren't so much anti-pipeline as we are pro-water.”

ENLISTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Without a doubt, Dominion is the most powerful player on the state's political landscape, and political decisions tend to go their way. Because of this, Dominion has neither felt compelled to work with citizens, local boards, or councils on their proposed route, nor to give proper consideration for public water supplies, local roads and bridges, historic resources, planning districts, or schools.

That led us to **decision number two at the farmhouse planning session: Lock arms with the local governing officials on key issues.** In that first summer of pipeline resistance, so many community members attended a meeting of the Augusta County Board of Supervisors that we packed the house. The citizens presented a petition, not railing against local leaders but asking for help in understanding the risks of this project and reassuring representatives that citizens would have their backs as the process plays itself out.

Three years later, as FERC wrapped up its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) comment period, that strong partnership continues. In the intervening years, Augusta County's supervisors and its service authority (in charge of public water and sewer supplies) have funded water studies, communicated with FERC, demanded meetings with Dominion, and hosted public informational meetings to help protect county citizens. The city of Staunton, whose main water source stands to be

impacted by the pipeline route through the county, has followed suit. In a world where elected officials are frequently at odds with citizens, we have formed effective partnerships between the two.

REMEMBER THE PEOPLE IN THE PATH

The third major rule in this fight is to stand with the people in the path of the pipeline.

While everyone will potentially be affected if the pipeline is built—higher electric rates, threatened water supplies, and the constant potential of explosion are just a few worries—those in the direct path stand to lose the most. The job of the Augusta County Alliance, then, has been to unite the entire community while not forgetting those who face losing their homes or businesses.

One example came last fall at the Augusta County Farm Bureau annual meeting. The pipeline is poised to cross some of Augusta’s finest farmland. Despite Dominion’s assurances that farm operations will not be permanently altered, the reality is far different. Timber production on the route will be erased forever, and construction and the pipe will permanently alter soil temperatures, drainage, and aeration. In many cases, there will be added restrictions on land use.

Because farmers are an independent lot, convincing those not directly affected by the pipeline to stand together on this project took some doing. In the end, when presented with the pipeline facts and stirring comments from farmers directly affected as well as those miles away from the pipeline route, the county farm bureau passed a resolution opposing transmission pipelines because they “adversely affect ground water, crop production, livestock health, public safety, our agricultural heritage, and common

natural treasures.” The farmers opposed the use of eminent domain for the project, stating that pipelines should only be allowed to cross farmlands “with the freely-given consent of the landowner and proper and appropriate compensation.”

IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Starting with that first kitchen table strategy session, the Augusta County Alliance has spent three years uniting a community and its leaders. A drive through our landscape shows anti-pipeline signs along the pipeline route and far from it. “No Pipeline” bumper stickers are everywhere. Even rural church leaders ask us to bring the pipeline message to their congregations.

As we head into year four of this struggle, we don’t know what the future holds for the project. But we know our voices are being heard. Dominion is more than a year behind schedule, and Virginia’s Department of Environmental Quality just announced that it will require state permits for stream and wetland crossings rather than rely on a blanket nationwide permit from the Army Corps, as Dominion had hoped. The Forest Service continues to raise questions about unproven construction techniques on steep and unstable slopes and threats to native brook trout.

And while we don’t know the outcome, we do know that our united conservative community voice that says “pro-land, pro-business, pro-water” is a power to be reckoned with as this all unfolds.

Augusta County Alliance Co-Chair Nancy Sorrells is an historian and a former County Supervisor. She has provided consulting and community outreach support to the Shenandoah Valley Network since 2013. Learn more at svnva.org and AugustaCountyAlliance.org.



Local property rights advocates oppose the pipeline on the basis of the misuse of eminent domain powers for private gain.



Pipeline impacts would be significant—local elected officials have raised concerns of risks to local drinking water supplies.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The field of civic engagement and community organizing has shifted in some significant ways in recent years due to the emergence of technology and social media as public engagement tools, new generations' preferences for how they participate in civic society, and the increasing political polarization of American society. To help you keep up with these changes, we have compiled the following list of tools, resources, guides and technologies related to civic engagement.

HELPFUL GUIDES, TRAININGS AND RESOURCES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- The Alliance of Justice's **Bolder Advocacy** initiative offers a suite of tools to build the advocacy skills of nonprofit organizations. Examples include the free **PowerCheck** tool to help groups assess their community organizing capacity; tools and case studies to help you evaluate community organizing efforts (**RECO**), guides to help you plan specific advocacy campaigns (e.g. the **Just Enough Planning Guide**) and guidance for navigating IRS lobbying rules.
- **Civic Engagement in the Digital Age**, a 2013 Pew Research Report, examines online and offline political engagement and the role of social networking sites in people's political activities.
- The **National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation** is a network of 2,000+ innovators who use "dialogue and deliberation" processes to help bring people together across divides to discuss, decide, and take action together on today's toughest issues. The NCDD resource center includes thousands of guides and tools to help you promote public engagement and conflict resolution locally, including their **Resource Guide on Public Engagement** and supporting materials for civic engagement processes like charrettes, appreciative inquiry, conversation cafés, 21st Century Town Meetings and many others.

- Essential Partners' **Public Conversations Project** offers workshops to enhance leaders' ability to plan, facilitate, and engage in more constructive conversations to increase community engagement. They offer useful resources to help you lead your community in an exploration of water as a bipartisan issue, including the free guides **Reaching Across the Red, Blue Divide** and **Constructive Conversations about Challenging Times—A Guide to Community Dialogue**.
- The **Resistance School** is a free, online training program to help communities organize and make sustained change that advances values of fairness, equality, and inclusivity. Organized by a group of graduate students in the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government, trainers include leading figures in the fields of social movements, grassroots advocacy and organizing.

MOBILE APPS, PLUG-INS & OTHER TECHNOLOGIES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

- **Care2**, **Change.org**, and **MoveOn.org**—some of the many online platforms that offer a range of services related to creating, promoting and managing online campaigns and petitions.
- **ControlShift**—a set of web tools to help organizations build community, leadership, and power based on a distributed organizing model that mobilizes your members to initiate and run their own related online campaigns and events (e.g. think of a statewide campaign around permit enforcement that allows your members to launch a campaign around a particular local permit). This allows you to identify new leaders and broaden your supporter base. Fees apply.
- **Congresslookup**—a free WordPress plug-in that helps visitors to your website identify and connect with their Congressional legislators.

- **Countable**—a free mobile app that makes it easy to understand and monitor Congressional bills on topics you select, contact your legislators and stay informed on the voting records of members of your Congressional delegation.
- **Daily Action**—a phone-based system that sends users a daily text message about an urgent issue based on your zip code that links you to you Senator, member of Congress or other official.
- **IOBY** (In Our Backyard)—a mix between crowdfunding and resource organizing, this platform connects leaders with funding to support neighborhood-based green projects.
- **MOB LAB**—a global training and research hub that provides advocacy organizations with strategies, tools and tactics for the digital era. Resources include **free online courses** on various aspects of running effective advocacy campaigns and the free tools on mobilization best practices through its **Mobilisation Integration Toolkit**.
- **Resistbot**—a free system that turns phone text messages into letters to Congress.
- **StoryCorps**—a free mobile app that allows you to create do-it-yourself interviews and capture local stories in your community.



Eunice Martinez is a resident of Tooleville, CA, where residents have dealt with unsafe nitrate and bacteria levels in the past and are now dealing with Chromium-6 contamination. © Community Water Center



The “STOP the Water Shutoffs” message has become a common sight across the city of Detroit. © We the People of Detroit



Communities’ support for clean water, property rights and their traditional agricultural heritage are fueling opposition to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline across the Shenandoah Valley. © Augusta County Alliance



MISSION, VISION, AND FOCUS

River Network empowers and unites people and communities to protect and restore rivers and other waters that sustain all life. We envision a future of clean and ample water for people and nature, where local caretakers are well-equipped, effective and courageous champions for our rivers. Our three strategies for focused investment are strong champions, clean water, and ample water.

HEADQUARTERS P.O. Box 21387, Boulder, Colorado 80308
303.736.2724 | info@rivernetwork.org

www.rivernetwork.org