

# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & CLIMATE PROTECTION

## CONFERENCE 2023 SUMMARY



*“Pollution anywhere is pollution everywhere. If we are truly committed to protecting the climate, we cannot turn a blind eye to environmental justice.”*

— DR. TREVA GEAR



Dr. Treva Gear

**In a perfect world, climate initiatives would focus on helping everyone in a community.** However, oftentimes climate protection programs exclude vulnerable populations. The intersection of climate protection with environmental justice is vital because it focuses on ensuring that everyone and everything has a seat at the table.

On June 15, 2023, **Science for Georgia, Dogwood Alliance, Center for Black Women’s Wellness, and Emory’s Center for Children’s Health Assessment, Research Translation, and Combating Environmental Racism (CHARTER)**, hosted the **2023 Environmental**

**Justice & Climate Protection Conference.** During the day, an estimated 185 people met to discuss current issues, initiatives, and most importantly, potential solutions to furthering environmental justice in the state of Georgia and beyond. The morning began with two keynote speakers, Dr. Becca Philipsborn and Dr. Treva Gear, who discussed the effect of climate change on the most vulnerable populations.



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Citizens' Climate Lobby





The day was focused on driving action and facilitating change. After the keynotes, there was a session focused on resources and tools available to empower action. Over lunch, attendees were given networking tasks and conversation starters. In the early afternoon, attendees heard from four community organizations who had been successful in driving change in Georgia, and then the day ended with a coalition building workshop.

Herein, we provide background information about environmental justice and climate protection, a brief overview of resources, exemplar programs, and best practices for coalition building. We end with suggestions and a by-numbers-summary.

Individual programs are highlighted on the EJ&CP Resource Page at <https://sciencelookup.org/knowledge-base1/ejcp-23-resource-page/>

## WHAT CAN WE DO?



### Individually

- **Reducing** food waste
- **Minimizing** use of single-use items, especially plastics
- **Being mindful** of purchases



### COLLECTIVELY

- **Transitioning** to clean and renewable energy sources
- **Improving** energy efficiency
- **Adopting** sustainable agricultural and land-use practices

## Background on Environmental Injustice in Georgia

Addressing environmental injustices is vital as we move forward with protecting our world. Historically marginalized communities have borne the brunt of the health effects from pollution and environmental disasters. Citizens of Georgia face hazardous waste sites, water pollution, air pollution, flooding issues, and more. The Environmental Justice movement can trace its origins to the city of Atlanta in 1900 when citizens began advocating against the dumping of waste into Proctor Creek.

Unfortunately, race has the strongest correlation to air, water, and land pollution in Georgia. One clear example of environmental injustice exists in Macon, Georgia. Macon has a majority Black population with 25% living under the poverty line and only 32% of the population having a GED or high school diploma. Macon also has some of the worst air quality in Georgia due to several industrial plants that have abhorrent emissions ratings. Plant Arkwright in Macon was ranked in the worst 20% in the nation for total releases of major chemicals and waste and Riverwood International and other plants regularly receive low emissions ratings for carbon monoxide, nitrates, volatile organic compounds, and other known carcinogens.

***Unfortunately, race has the strongest correlation to air, water, and land pollution in Georgia.***



Water pollution is another major source of environmental injustices in Georgia. Georgia's waterways were ranked the 8th worst in the United States by the Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center. Many of Georgia's main waterways, such as the Chattahoochee River, the Flint River, and the Savannah River, are polluted. These are waterways that people use every day as a source of water and/or recreation. In Savannah, studies show that the neighborhoods affected by these environmental issues are more likely to be low-income and Black. Sources of the pollution stem from industrial polluters, the agribusiness industry contributing the runoff of toxic fertilizer from farms, and litter.

To begin to remedy these injustices, we need to engage in community led initiatives and work with our local and state legislators to create tangible changes. Environmental justice is a movement that will impact every person and will improve the future of the state of Georgia.

## Resources

There is a reason that historically marginalized communities are easy targets for environmental injustices. Goal setting, listening, capacity building, and data gathering takes time, talent, and treasure.

Several organizations provided overviews of the resources they provide to enable partnerships to form and people and organizations to work together to improve local communities.

**CHARTER** and **HERCULES** are focused on translating evidence-based best-practices from the lab out into the community. They have readily available resources and grants to support partnerships between researchers and the community.

The EPA and the **Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)** also have publicly available, science-based, information that can be used to understand the risks and mitigations of environmental issues. They also have grant programs to support research and support community programs.

Science for Georgia is working with partners to compile a **Georgia specific Environmental Justice Map**. This map has a base-layer of socio-economic and environmental indicators. Sci4Ga is keen to work with partners to make this map more granular and focused on specific community issues and data.

### DEFINITIONS

#### Environmental Justice

Addressing environmental issues, especially those caused by past injustices, via solutions that have meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income.

#### Climate Protection

Precautionary actions, procedures, or installations undertaken to prevent or reduce harm from pollution to natural weather conditions or patterns, including the prevailing temperature, atmospheric composition, and precipitation.

#### Environmental Health

The branch of public health concerned with monitoring or mitigating the factors in the environment that affect human health and disease. The study of the influence of the environment on physical, biological, chemical, and psychosocial factors of human health.

#### Climate Anxiety

A heightened emotional, mental, or somatic distress in response to dangerous changes in the climate system.

#### Climate Change

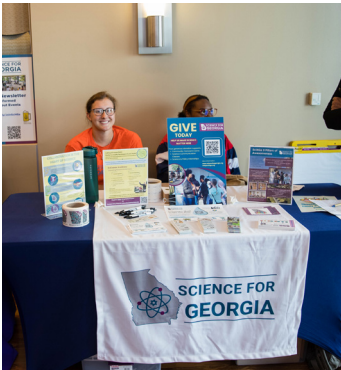
The long-term shift in weather patterns on Earth. It is driven by human activities that release greenhouse gasses and pollutants into the atmosphere.

Climate change impact can include rising sea levels, increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events like hurricanes and heatwaves, changes in precipitation patterns, and ecosystem disruptions.

It poses significant risks to human health, food security, water resources, and economies.



*These community-led changes have local benefits and also contribute toward global solutions.*



(Clockwise from top left) Kandyss Watson; Sue Casteel; Tabatha Schwartz; Rep. Becky Evans; The crowd listening with rapt attention; Penelope Helm.



## Community Outreach Best Practices

Global needs are great, and individual changes are empowering, but there are many ways that communities can come together to create impactful local changes. These community-led changes have local benefits and also contribute toward global solutions.

Successful community-led programs aim to enhance existing systems to achieve immediate success while working towards long-term transformation. The EJ&CP Conference highlighted these programs to inspire change and spark ideas for conference attendees.

The example programs and the resource agencies utilized best practices as outlined in the [Principles of Community Engagement](#).

### CLEARLY DEFINE A PROJECT'S GOALS



**Dogwood Alliance** is a multi-state organization focused on forest protection and environmental justice. When they partnered with the Concerned Citizens of Cook County (4C) they focused on two wood pellet plants that were going to adversely affect the citizens of Adel, GA. Dogwood brought to the table a knowledge of larger environmental issues, but 4C had the local knowledge about their specific community. Their work together led to holding a large industrial facility accountable to the needs of a historically marginalized community. This provides a blueprint for how other communities, especially those that have been traditionally ignored, can make their voices heard.

## LISTEN FIRST



**Greenlink Analytics** is a non-profit analytics company that works with local governments and communities to create plans to lower energy burden and environmental impact. They bring to the table knowledge of multiple interventions and programs that can be successful. But each community is different and has different priorities. A solution must be made in concert with the community in order to achieve buy-in and long-term successes. When crafting a plan for the city of Decatur they hosted multiple community roundtables, surveys, and canvassing events to ensure the needs of the community were heard.

## IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND BUILD CAPACITY



The organization **CBWW** provides various health education and promotion programs to increase awareness about significant health concerns and share prevention strategies. Their efforts center on empowering Black women to protect their health and their children's health.

A cornerstone of CBWW's success has been working hand-in-hand with the community they serve. The CBWW regularly hosts focus groups with the community to identify their priorities and then gauge their level of understanding about an issue. This enables them to integrate health literacy into all their programs and create materials that can build capacity of their community. CBWW conducts social media outreach, train the trainer workshops, and community event outreach with materials that are tailored for their community.

## GATHER DATA



While anecdotal stories are a powerful method to gain attention, it is important to be able to back these claims with evidence. **Georgia WAND**, an organization that empowers women to advocate for the climate, environmental, and social justice works with their communities to gather data about issues in the Georgia and Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). The CSRA faces numerous environmental issues, and WAND has been working with partners to track air quality and health issues (including cancer hot-spots). By enumerating the health and environmental concerns that community sees, their arguments are backed by powerful evidence.

## BUILDING A COALITION



Building a coalition requires self-reflection on the type of organization you are and the type of work your organization wants to do. **Beth Remmes led conference attendees in an introspective workshop** that drew examples from nature.

Once an organization understands the space(s) they work in or wish to work in – it is important to identify their strengths and weaknesses in these areas and work to build complimentary partnerships. Examples of partnerships in nature were provided illustrating that partnerships have to provide a net benefit by exchanging different resources they are willing and able to provide.

Workshop participants then worked through exercises to think about successful and unsuccessful partnerships to identify how they could better utilize strengths in the future.

## Suggestions and Next Steps

- **A follow-on matchmaking survey was conducted by Sci4Ga** and throughout the fall they will work to connect individuals and groups.
- **Conference partners will plan and execute an EJ&CP conference next summer**, hopefully somewhere on the Georgia Coast.
- **Multiple groups in Georgia are beginning to explore Environmental Justice Legislation.**



# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & CLIMATE PROTECTION CONFERENCE

## 2023 BY THE NUMBERS



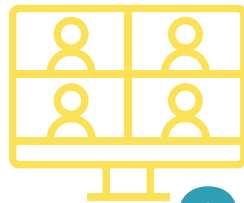
**100+**  
in-person  
attendees

“*This conference exposed me to people and ideas that I don't normally encounter.*”



**100%**  
learned something  
new from the event  
(and would like to attend next year!)

“*I get so inspired listening to the speakers and know how many others “out there” care about the same issues I do. :-)*”



**85+**  
online  
attendees

“*I think this conference was super informative and I am excited to see what next year will hold.*”



**94%**  
plan to share  
what they  
learned with  
others

“*I learned from every presentation and made good connections at the conference, so I would attend again next year.*”



**97%**  
found that the  
conference well  
organized