

# BEYOND TOXICS SPRING NEWSLETTER

SPRING • SUMMER 2024



Silver Falls State Park

## OUR MISSION

We envision a society where everyone has equitable access to healthy food and clean air and water, and underserved communities are included in decision making processes that affect them. Together, we move beyond the damaging environmental practices of the past and collectively work to support and maintain ecological resilience and balance.



## This issue:

**PAGE 2**

Ways To Support Bees

**PAGE 3**

Staff Spotlight Eric

**PAGE 4**

Staff Spotlight Raevyn

**PAGE 5**

PFAS & The Willamette River

**PAGE 7**

Rise As Leaders Student Spotlight

**PAGE 8**

Breaking Boundaries with Fossil Free Eugene

**PAGE 9**

The Truth About Artificial Turf

## Message from our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Beyond Toxics' team is navigating a fast-paced world of toxic exposures, holding polluters to account, and introducing protective environmental policies for all Oregonians!

We pioneer much of Oregon's action to solve environmental health problems. So often, we are the first to step forward to tackle the most vexing issues—from bringing the first-ever policies to curb aerial herbicide sprays in forests to some of the first challenges to stop the expansion of fossil fuels. Looking back through our history of achievements, in 2011 Beyond Toxics successfully **stopped a large natural gas power plant** slated to be built in the Willamette Valley—our campaign was truly a pacesetter! This year, our work to **regulate landfills** and **end dangerous pesticide sprays at schools** are cutting-edge projects that will protect the health of our most vulnerable Oregonians.

**We rely on your unwavering commitment and generosity** to propel us forward in our progress. Making your tax-deductible spring donation sustains our amazing campaigns and guarantees tangible, transformative changes on environmental protections!

Together, let us construct a sustainable and just future. Your donation to Beyond Toxics helps forge a healthier, more equitable Oregon!

*Yours in pursuit of environmental justice,*



## Become a Bee Protector!

By: Emily Matlock

Calling all Bee Protectors! How can you help pollinator habitats at home?

Did you know we have around **700 species of native bees in Oregon**? Honey bees get a lot of press, but it's especially important to protect native bees and their habitats for healthy and regenerative ecosystems. This summer, consider making a pollinator oasis in your outdoor spaces with a few simple tips:

**Bee observant!** Spend time in your pollinator oasis to see who stops by. Being aware and learning about your local flora and fauna will help you continue to protect them. Bees, birds, bats, beetles, and flies all play a role in a healthy and thriving ecosystem!

Make sure to visit us at the **10th Annual Bee Jazzy** this year to support our work to Save Oregon's Bees during our biggest annual fundraising event! We hope to see you there!

**Join us on June 13 for our Bee Jazzy benefit to Save Oregon's Bees at Silvan Ridge Winery from 5:30-9pm. Tickets are on sale at BeeJazzy.org.**



## Don't clean up leaf litter too early!

Bees overwinter and nest in leaf piles and won't wake up until soil temperatures rise.

## Participate in No/Low Mow May!

Dandelions and clovers are some of a bee's first foods available after winter. Leave them be until more blooms crop up.

## Build a hydration station!

Using a shallow dish with pebbles or glass beads, create a shady spot for bees and bugs to drink up when it's hot out. Just make sure the water's not too deep!

## Know your native plants!

Visit a native plant nursery and research what plants attract pollinators. See what flowers or bushes are a-buzz in your area! Try to have something blooming all season long.



**SCAN TO BUY BEE JAZZY TICKETS**

## Staff Spotlight



### ERIC RICHARDSON

NAACP ENVIRONMENTAL &  
CLIMATE JUSTICE LIAISON

Beyond Toxics is thrilled to have Eric Richardson join us as the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Liaison, working to strengthen the relationships between our organizations as we work toward a more just future!

Eric has a longstanding relationship with the Eugene-Springfield NAACP and the community at large. He became president of the local NAACP chapter in 2012 and later served as the Executive Director. During that time, Eric worked to establish environmental and climate justice work in partnership with Beyond Toxics and other local organizations.

In this new role, Eric is continuing his passion project of preserving the history of the African American community in Lane County.

**“My interest in telling the story of African American history parallels the work of environmental justice and land use, looking at how decisions have been made in the past and wanting to be an advocate for policy going forward as well with this lens that looks at historically disadvantaged populations,”** Eric said.

Eric has also served as president of the City Club of Eugene, was on the board of United Way Lane County, and is currently on the board of Habitat for Humanity of Oregon.

**“So much of what I do is try to model civic engagement and volunteerism.”**

Eric raised five kids in Eugene, all of whom graduated from Churchill High School. He took up jazz in high school and currently plays bass in a band. He also works with Nurturley to host a musical cultural story-time for kids on the last Saturday of the month!

## RAEVYN THOMPSON

ENVIRONMENTAL &  
CLIMATE JUSTICE  
ORGANIZER

We are excited to announce that Raevyn Thompson is joining Beyond Toxics as our new Environmental and Climate Justice Organizer! Raevyn grew up in rural southern Oregon and studied family and human services with a minor in legal studies at the University of Oregon. She's looking forward to blending her passion for helping others with her love for the outdoors in this new role.

**“Environmental and climate justice go hand in hand with human services and public health, so I think this is a really exciting position for me to see where I can fill the gaps in our community,”** she said.

Raevyn is looking forward to learning more about the many project areas at Beyond Toxics and within our coalition spaces.



**“I’m really passionate about working with people in the community and knowing how I can advocate for the needs that people have,”** Raevyn said.

Raevyn is especially interested in our youth advocacy programs like Rise as Leaders, working on policy or legal issues, and she’s eager to know more about our bee conservation efforts.

When she’s not working, Raevyn loves to be outside hiking, kayaking, and camping. She also enjoys spending time with her cat and being creative, building lego sets, or diamond painting. She likes to make people laugh and believes that laughter is truly the best medicine.



# PFAS & The Willamette River

By: The Beyond Toxics Team

## Understanding “Forever Chemicals”

PFAS, short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl chemicals, are prevalent in our daily lives, from waterproof clothing to cookware, floss, cleaning products, and contact lenses. These virtually indestructible “forever” chemicals have made their way into our bloodstreams, soils, rivers and drinking water.

**Exposure to PFAS has been linked with a 56% increased risk of thyroid and kidney cancers,** and recent studies even show that PFAS can be passed from mothers to newborns through the umbilical cord.

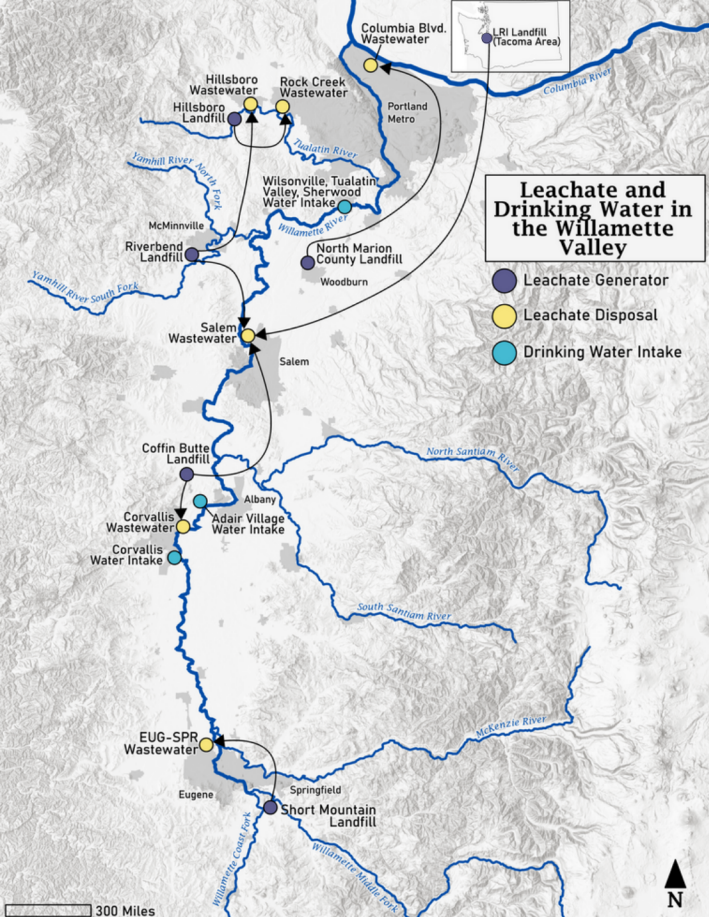
When we throw PFAS-ridden items in the trash, the PFAS chemicals leach from the trash as it degrades. As a result, leachate, a highly toxic liquid byproduct from landfills, is concentrated with PFAS. Then landfills ship their leachate to wastewater treatment plants where it is combined with sewage.

Wastewater treatment facilities aren’t set up to handle PFAS, so PFAS from both wastewater and leachate end up in the Willamette river. **The concentrations of PFAS exceed EPA health standards.**

Why should we all be concerned about the lack of effective treatment for PFAS before it ends up in the Willamette River and its tributaries?

*First*, PFAS can be absorbed through the skin, which is dangerous for recreationists all along the Willamette from Eugene to Portland.

*Second*, many cities draw their drinking water downstream from wastewater treatment plants. However, water intake facilities do not currently treat PFAS. Until Oregon adopts policies that safeguard our rivers from PFAS, we may be at higher risk of ingesting PFAS through our drinking water!



Spatial Data Credit: Oregon Geohub. Leachate Data collected from Localities.

The map above shows the movement of leachate and wastewater relative to drinking water intake facilities in the Willamette Valley.

*Third*, fish absorb PFAS in their tissue where it stays forever. People who eat those fish are then also exposed to additional PFAS.

### Challenges Ahead

The problem of PFAS accumulating in the environment has become so critical that, on April 10, 2024, the EPA announced drinking water regulations for six types of PFAS, acknowledging their health risks.

## Oregon must implement stricter regulations to treat PFAS in landfill leachate before it reaches our rivers!

This will safeguard the health of recreationalists, fish, and drinking water for thousands of Oregonians!

## Addressing PFAS contamination is crucial!

*Exciting news:* Beyond Toxics and partners at the Oregon Environmental Council secured a grant from the PNW Center for Translational Environmental Health Research. This grant will facilitate testing for PFAS in everyday products like cosmetics, cleaning products, and artificial turf.

Data collected will inform policy solutions to minimize PFAS in consumer goods, thereby reducing the PFAS levels in landfills and watersheds.

By implementing upstream solutions, such as banning PFAS in consumer products and reducing their creation, we can collectively reduce the health risks and water contamination associated with these persistent chemicals. We all have a right to safe consumer products and water!



This mural was designed  
by the Rise As Leaders  
Fall 2023 cohort.

## Rise As Leaders: Empowering Youth to Take Climate Action!

By: Olivia Farnham

Fear and uncertainty about the future is almost a universal experience for today's youth. Young people grapple with the weight of climate anxiety, feeling both overwhelmed and isolated. Amid these challenges, providing a safe haven that validates their identities, amplifies their voices, and nurtures their leadership potential becomes imperative.

Our Rise as Leaders program seeks to address these needs by offering pathways to action, fostering project-based learning, and emboldening students to become change-makers within their communities.

As we geared up for the launch of our fifth cohort this spring, we had the privilege of getting to know Celena Bajracharya.

Celena is a lively student at Sheldon High School with a deep sense of curiosity for the world around her and how she can make a difference in our community.

We sat down with Celena with a lively chat to learn more about her passions!

### Student Spotlight CELENA BAJRACHARYA





## Beyond Toxics

**Tell us about yourself! How did you become interested in environmental issues?**

**Celena**

When I was a kid, I really loved National Geographic magazines. I think that's what began my curiosity surrounding how the world works, about history and about the environment. My curiosity surrounding the mysteries of the earth and my desire to help make the world a better place is what lead me to becoming interested in environmental issues. Because in my opinion, taking care of the planet as well as those who live on it is one of the best ways to help make the world a better place.

## Beyond Toxics

**How has the climate crisis affected children and youth in your area?**

**Celena**

We have seen the weather become crazier and more unpredictable in recent years, with record breaking heat in the summers and unprecedented intense wildfire seasons. Beyond mental and emotional effects, kids are going to miss out on experiencing some of the great things I got to experience because of the climate and environment changing as time goes on.

## Beyond Toxics

**What are some changes or actions that you want to see happen in your community?**

**Celena**

Recently, I have learned the University of Oregon is the biggest emitter of greenhouse gasses in Eugene due to their natural gas powered campus heating system. I would like to see actions being taken to reduce the university's greenhouse gas emissions, to reduce Eugene's greenhouse gas emissions as a whole.



Photo by: Claire Barber

## Breaking Boundaries with Fossil Free Eugene

By: Lisa Arkin

As we step into our third year on the steering committee of the Fossil Free Eugene coalition, we're invigorated by the strides made in reshaping our community's relationship with fossil fuels. Alongside valued allies like **Cascadia Wildlands**, **Breach Collective**, **Springfield-Eugene Tenants Association**, **350 Eugene**, and the **Eugene/Springfield NAACP**, Beyond Toxics remains steadfast in our holistic commitment to ushering in a future powered by renewable energy for all!

Our endeavors within Fossil Free Eugene have yielded tangible results in our collective journey towards a just transition away from polluting fossil fuels. Through innovative research initiatives like our "*Fumes in Focus*" project, we've spotlighted the perilous levels of indoor air pollution stemming from gas appliances, igniting conversations about the urgent need for change.

Additionally, our contributions to reports such as "*Oregon's Hidden Air Pollution Problem: Fossil Fuels in Buildings*" shed light on the outsized impact of methane emissions from gas appliances to overall greenhouse gas emissions that fuel climate change.

**Our mission: challenge fossil fuel misinformation, revealing the true cost of society's reliance on polluting products!** By organizing efforts to expose and debunk deceptive narratives of the fossil fuel industry, we're dedicated to dismantling the industry's grip on our communities.

Let's challenge ourselves: *How can we break free from the fossil-fuel industry's influence, even in our homes?* The solution lies in pioneering innovation! Projects like our Bethel Clean Energy campaign empower low-income households to adopt efficient, sustainable alternatives like heat pumps. Our proposal to repurpose the J.H. Baxter creosote wood preservative site as a solar array underscores our commitment to community-driven, renewable energy solutions.

As we reflect on our achievements, we invite you to join us in charting the course towards equitable and clean climate action! **Together, we can forge a future where transportation, heating, and manufacturing systems are built with the strongest health and environmental protections.**



## The Truth About Artificial Turf

By: Lisa Arkin

What's green, black, and laden with toxic chemicals for eternity? Look no further than artificial turf, the ubiquitous alternative to natural grass infiltrating our public parks and schoolyards. While marketed as a solution for convenience, the rise of artificial turf represents a dangerous trade-off, prioritizing short-term expediency over the long-term health of our children and environment.

The glossy façade of synthetic turf advertising reflects the vested interests of fossil fuel and plastic industries. Despite durability and eco-friendliness claims, closer scrutiny reveals hidden costs and environmental harm.

The facts explain why parents, youth, athletes, neighborhood leaders, and park managers should question and object to the installation of artificial turf in our communities.

**Cost:** Contrary to belief, artificial turf is a costly long-term investment. Life cycle cost analyses show expenses quickly escalate, covering site prep, installation, maintenance, and landfill disposal every decade. Synthetic turf fields cost about 2.5 times more than natural grass fields, conveniently overlooked by artificial turf advocates.

**Climate Impacts:** Artificial turf exacerbates urban heat islands, with surface temperatures soaring significantly higher than natural grass. Plastics and crumb rubber absorb heat, posing health risks from heat stress, especially for youth engaging in sports activities.

**Environmental Contamination:** Artificial grass contains toxic materials like lead, zinc, phthalates, and PFAS, posing risks to humans and wildlife. Concerns also arise about its contribution to microplastic pollution in waterways, amplifying the threat of ecological damage.

**Human Health:** The peril is not limited to the environment. Scientists warn of a looming crisis as microplastics infiltrate our bloodstreams. Children and athletes face heightened risks of exposure, underscoring the urgent need for preventive action.

**What Happens Next:** Communities nationwide are taking a stand to ban artificial turf in light of its environmental impact! Stay vigilant and oppose its installation in local schools or parks to prevent further ecological harm.

Let's reject corporate rhetoric that promotes plastics over health! We're working to turn the tide against artificial turf and pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable future.



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