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The Highlands Voice

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Highlands Conservancy Comments on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IN CANAAN VALLEY

By Dave Saville and Marilyn Shoenfeld

At the time of the establishment of the Highlands Conservancy in the mid 1960s a "pumped storage" power facility (Davis Power Project) threatened Canaan Valley with inundation. While this wasn't the only threat to the Highlands that was the impetus for the formation of the group, it was an important one. It was also one that captured the fledgling organization's interest and it spent the next 40 years in a legal and public relations battle to stop the dam on the Blackwater River.

Since that time, the Highlands Conservancy worked to get Canaan Valley included in the National Wildlife Refuge system. This it was successful at doing and in 1995 Canaan Valley became the Nation's 500th National Wildlife Refuge. Since that time, we have supported the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and have heavily invested in volunteer hours and leadership in its protection.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service, the federal agency that manages the Refuge, has been working for the past several years to

develop a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). This is the planning document that will guide the management of the Refuge for the next fifteen years. There are four alternatives that have been developed for the draft CCP, a "No-Action" alternative that would continue current management, a "preferred" alternative, a "conservation" alternative and an alternative that focuses more on public uses.

The Highlands Conservancy's Public Lands Committee has submitted comments on the draft CCP and has chosen to put forth a series of guiding principles based on the issues rather than endorsing one of the alternatives. Certainly there were elements of all four alternatives we favored. Our comments ask USF&WS to carefully evaluate the consequences of the expansion of human activity and to favor natural processes and to practice conservation and restoration. The following is what WVHC supports:

Minimizing Disturbance. Disturbing soils and exposing them to sunlight causes a large release of the soil's carbon into

the atmosphere, diminishing the soil itself. Disturbed soils increase erosion from wind and water harming waterways and wetlands. We suggest that management activities should always consider using the least disturbing methods for achieving management goals. A carbon budget should be prepared to estimate and document the carbon released into the atmosphere from soil exposing and disturbing activities.

Restoring Natural Succession and Old Growth Conditions. Originally, red spruce and balsam fir forests covered thousands of acres in Canaan Valley. These forests are now gone as a result of logging and fire. We support natural succession and restoration of these natural conditions using non-intrusive and low-impact means. Old growth forests provide a natural mosaic of successional habitats. Management goals should aim to allow the forests to return to such a natural balance. Creating and maintaining artificial habitats through such

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That Bump of Curiosity

At the front of Dave Elkinton's history of this organization, after Ken Hechler's foreword and Dave's introduction, there's an undated photograph, "Conservancy Board Members." It can't be earlier than 1979, the year Cindy Rank first came on the board. She's the only one pictured who's still serving (she was just a kid then). The significant presence over Cindy's right shoulder is Jeannette Fitzwilliams, a gray-haired Brit who played an important role in our development.

Jeannette was the organizational representative from the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC), based in Washington—and we were one of her personal projects. She had come to this country after serving with the Royal Air Force in India during World War II. An avid hiker, she took over responsibility for a section of the Appalachian Trail in Shenandoah National Park. But she was always looking for new country to explore, and new volunteers to help conserve it. Dolly Sods became one of her favorite places.

As the Highlands Conservancy led the campaign for wilderness designation for the Sods, Otter Creek, and the Cranberry, Jeannette became a go-between who encouraged, instructed, and put up at her house in Arlington those who came to testify before Congressional committees. A few years later, when the Forest Service was compelled to re-survey its roadless areas for other wilderness possibilities—the RARE II process—she wrote a series of articles for the *Voice*, encouraging citizen comments.

She wrote: "Right now governments everywhere are making an effort . . . to involve the public in the decision making process. If we do not respond, they are going to stop. If Conservancy members respond on Wilderness, then it becomes that much easier when the WVHC wants to take a position on some other issue."

Jeannette knew government agencies from the inside. She worked for a number of them as an economist, and published influential papers on health and wealth. Eventually, her love of the natural world took over her professional life. She was a co-founder of the Rails to Trails Conservancy and president of the National Trails Council.

The National Trails Act had become law in 1968. Jeannette's concern was always to give the Act life, and not allow it to become a dead letter. To that end, she urged better cooperation between the federal government and volunteers such as PATC in trail planning. As she testified to a Congressional committee, "Annual vegetation growth and erosion do not accommodate themselves to budget deficits."

It has been a long time since we heard her resonant voice and enjoyed her stories. She gave up her position on our board in 1989, and PATC's organizational membership lapsed. Last month, we learned that Jeannette had died at the age of 96.

Coincidentally, the Highlands Conservancy has been urged to emulate the PATC and take responsibility for maintaining some highlands trails. Where is Jeannette's successor? Who can be persuaded to beat the bushes for volunteers, train them and lead them? This person would not only care about trails, but also enjoy partnering with the overworked recreation specialists at the Forest Service.

The source of Jeannette's energy and commitment is hinted

(More on p. 12)

Roster of Officers, Board Members and Committee Chairs and Board of Directors

PRESIDENT: Hugh Rogers, Moon Run, Kerens, WV 26276, (304)636-2662, hugh.rogers@gmail.com

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT: Buff Rodman, 32 Crystal Dr., Oakmont, PA 15139; (412) 828-8983; buffrodman@hotmail.com

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STATE AFFAIRS: Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Rd., Charleston, WV 25314, (304) 342-8989; martinjul@aol.com

VICE PRESIDENT FOR FEDERAL AFFAIRS: Marilyn Shoenfeld, HC 70 Box 553, 23 Sands Springs Lane, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484, marilyn.shoenfeld@gmail.com

SECRETARY: John McFerrin, 114 Beckley Ave., Beckley, WV 25801, (304)252-8733, johnmcferrin@aol.com

TREASURER: Bob Marshall, 886-Z Divide Ridge Road, Kenna WV 25248 (304)545-6817, woodhavenwva@aim.com

PAST PRESIDENT: Frank Young, Rt. 1, Box 108, Ripley, WV 25271, (304)372-3945, fyoung@mountain.net

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2010)

Don Gasper, 4 Ritchie St., Buckhannon, WV 26201; (304)472-3704

Bob Gates, Box 5130, Charleston, WV 25361; photonzx@ntelos.net.

George Beetham, geobeet@hotmail.com

Bill McNeel, 1118 Second Ave., Marlinton, WV 24954, (304)799-4369; wpmcneel@gmail.com

Peter Shoenfeld, HC 70, Box 553, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484, (301) 642-2820; PShoenfeld@gmail.com

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2011)

Bob Henry Baber, 207 Howard St., Glenville, WV 26351, (304) 462-0320, mayorbobhenrybaber@yahoo.com

Dave Fouts, HC 80, Box 993, Maysville, WV 26833, (304) 749-8172, foutsberg@citlink.net

Larry Thomas P.O. Box 194, Circleville, WV 26804, (304) 567-2602, larryvthomas@aol.com

Carter Zerbe, 16 Arlington Ct., Charleston, WV 25301, (304)343-3175; scz3667@aol.com

Mike Withers, Rt 2, Box 328, Grafton WV 26354, 304-265-3750, 1nastynash@comcast.net

ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTORS

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY: Robert (Bob) Handley, HC 67 Box 508 Renick, WV, 24966 497-2266; leatherwing@frontiernet.net

PITTSBURGH CLIMBERS: Jean Rodman, 32 Crystal Dr., Oakmont, PA 15139, (412)828-8983; jeanrodman@verizon.net

BROOKS BIRD CLUB: Cindy Ellis, RR 1, Box 163, Red House, WV 25168 (304) 586-4135; cdellis@wildblue.net

MOUNTAINEER CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED: Chris Byrd, 292 Magnolia Ave., Clarksburg, WV 26301 Tel. (304) 622-3023 <cbyrd@ma.rr.com>

WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION: Don Garvin, P.O. Box 666, Buckhannon, WV 26201; (304) 472-8716; DSGJR@aol.com

FRIENDS OF THE LITTLE KANAWHA: Cindy Rank, HC 78, Box 227, Rock Cave, WV 26234, (304)924-5802; clrank@hughes.net

TEAM (Taylor Environmental Advocacy Membership): Beth Baldwin, Grafton, WV 26354, 304-265-3029, elbrn6e21@msn.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

MINING COMMITTEE: Cindy Rank, HC 78, Box 227, Rock Cave, WV 26234, (304)924-5802; clrank@hughes.net

PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: Marilyn Shoenfeld, HC 70, Box 553, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484, (301) 642-2820; Marilyn.Shoenfeld@gmail.com

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Frank Young, Rt. 1, Box 108, Ripley, WV 25271, (304)372-3945; fyoung@mountain.net

WIND ENERGY COMMITTEE: Peter Shoenfeld, HC 70, Box 553, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484, (301) 642-2820; PShoenfeld@gmail.com

ENDOWMENT FUND COMMITTEE: John McFerrin, 114 Beckley Ave., Beckley, WV 25801, (304)252-8733; johnmcferrin@aol.com

RIVERS COMMITTEE: vacant

HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: Hugh Rogers, Moon Run, Kerens, WV 26276, (304)636-2662; hugh.rogers@gmail.com

OUTINGS COMMITTEE: Dave Saville, PO Box 569, Morgantown, WV 26507, (304)284-9548; daves@labyrinth.net

MISCELLANEOUS OFFICES

SPEAKERS BUREAU: Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314, (304) 342-8989; martinjul@aol.com

WEB PAGE: Peter Shoenfeld, HC 70, Box 553, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484, (301) 642-2820; PShoenfeld@gmail.com and Jim Solley, jamessolley@comcast.net

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: Beth Little, HC 64, Box 281, Hillsboro, WV, 24946 (304) 653-4277; blittle@citynet.net

HIGHLANDS VOICE EDITOR: John McFerrin, 114 Beckley Ave., Beckley, WV 25801, (304)252-8733; johnmcferrin@aol.com

PUBLIC HEARING ENDS COMMENT PERIOD ON WATER QUALITY RULES

By Donald S. Garvin, Jr., West Virginia Environmental Council WVEC Legislative Coordinator

While turnout was light for the July 19 public hearing on the WV Department of Environmental Protection's proposed changes to the state's Water Quality Standards Rule, some powerful statements were made by those attending.

"Dirty water is expensive water," Morgantown city councilman and Deputy Mayor Don Spencer told the agency.

Spencer read a resolution from the Morgantown City Council urging DEP to enact strong standards for "total dissolved solids" (TDS) that have recently plagued the Monongahela River and its tributaries.

Last fall, a massive fish kill in Dunkard Creek, a tributary of the Monongahela River, was triggered by increased TDS pollution that allowed golden algae to bloom and kill most aquatic life in the stream.

TDS is comprised of various salts, such as chlorides and sulfates, that are dissolved in water. These pollutants can be dangerous to aquatic life, can make water used in drinking supplies taste and smell bad, and can also make water unfit for industrial uses. Extremely high TDS levels can impair human health.

In West Virginia high levels of TDS can come from a variety of sources, including coal-mining discharges and the disposal of fluids from large-scale oil and gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale formation. The Morgantown area is located in the heart of both of these industrial activities.

Ted Armbricht, a member of the state Environmental Quality Board, reminded DEP that water is an essential element for economic development in the state.

"Water is the resource of the 21st century, and we have it," Armbricht said.

He urged DEP to reconvene the stakeholders group initiated by EQB to develop limits on nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous in WV rivers and streams. These nutrients are the primary cause of algal growth now plaguing our streams and are contributing to the pollution problems in the Chesapeake Bay.

Also at the hearing, I presented a brief summary of the "group" comments submitted in writing by a coalition of environmental organizations. Signing on to those comments were the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, West Virginia Sierra Club, West Virginia Environmental Council, Mountaineer

Chapter of Trout Unlimited, West Virginia Citizen Action Group, and the League of Women Voters of West Virginia.

Several industry representatives and lobbyists also attended the public hearing, but not one of them spoke. It seems obvious to me that industry is reluctant to have their opposition to protective water quality standards reported by the press.

Now that the public comment period is over, DEP will consider all the comments it has received and prepare the final rule for filing with the Secretary of State's office. The Secretary of State will then forward the rule to the Legislature where it will first be considered by the Joint Legislative Rule-Making Review Committee, and then sent on to the full Legislature for its consideration during the 2011 regular session.

So the battle for strong, protective water quality standards is just beginning.

Voice Available Electronically

The Highlands Voice is now available for electronic delivery. You may, of course, continue to receive the paper copy. Unless you request otherwise, you will continue to receive it in paper form. If, however, you would prefer to receive it electronically instead of the paper copy please contact Beth Little at blittle@citynet.net. Electronic copies arrive as e-mail attachments a few days before the paper copy would have arrived

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The Highlands Voice is always printed on recycled paper. Our printer uses 100% post consumer recycled paper when available.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy web page is www.wvhighlands.org.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is a non-profit corporation which has been recognized as a tax exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service. Its bylaws describe its purpose:

The purposes of the Conservancy shall be to promote, encourage, and work for the conservation—including both preservation and wise use—and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the Nation, and especially of the Highlands Region of West Virginia, for the cultural, social, educational, physical, health, spiritual, and economic benefit of present and future generations of West Virginians and Americans.

MARCELLUS – RICHES OR RUIN ?

EPA - PROMISE OR PROCRASTINATION?

OSM – WHAAAT????? ARMY CORPS – YES, AND ?????

PATH – TO WHERE ? AND WHY ?????

By Cindy Rank

The energy capitals of the country are reeling with the mad dash for MORE, MORE, MORE energy, electricity, power, and, and, and...

.... And mother earth's supposed allies in federal and state government are either blindsided or overwhelmed. While we citizens are either dazzled, dazed, dumbfounded, or just darn angry !

As for me, things are happening at such a frenetic pace that I personally find it hard to breathe, much less think or focus enough to put two sentences together in understandable fashion. So, with apologies to *Voice* readers accustomed to more reasoned presentations of facts and questions, I beg your indulgence to allow me to vent a bit.

First, let us consider gas drilling into the deep Marcellus shale formation.

My apologies [again] for placing this first, but as the Organizational Representative of FOLK (Friends of the Little Kanawha) on the Board of Directors of the WV Highlands Conservancy I feel compelled to put my backyard first.

We are currently being swamped with Marcellus horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing.

Where oh where did this come from? ... And, ever more important, where is this taking us?

The concept of mountaintop removal brought phenomenal engineering technologies to the Appalachian ridges well before any state or regulatory agency could respond with adequate regulation and guidance to protect the earth and her children (animal: terrestrial and aquatic, vegetable: forests and plains, and human: communities and culture) as the environmental laws of the 1970's meant to protect them.

Longwall mining machines and technologies are holding those agencies hostage as well... much to the dismay of communities and to the dismal impacts to the water resources where that mining is occurring.

And now we have the 21st Century version of gas drilling overtaking all that is good and holy up and down the ridges and valleys of the Appalachian region – i.e. from

New York State through Pennsylvania and into West Virginia and parts of Ohio as well.

What it includes: Drill holes some ten thousand feet deep [~7,000 ft down vertically and 3-4,000 ft horizontally] ... Then fracking (pressure fracturing the tight shale rock) with some 2,000,000-6,000,000 (2-6 million) gallons of water [mixed with chemicals and sand] ... Then catching and disposing of at least some 1/3 of that frac water [now heavily laced with brine and naturally occurring radioactive material from the drilling process itself].

WOW!

For those of us along the Little Kanawha River it means our roads being torn up, traffic problems on those narrow roads and noise and drill sites lit up like Christmas trees, but also massive amounts of water being withdrawn from the headwaters we fought so hard to protect in the late 1970's and early '80's.

It's hard enough to accept the sometimes 5 acre well sites [at least twice the size of those 1980 well sites we abhorred] that accommodate up to 6 horizontal well bores. But the horror stories of these deep wells gone wrong due to pressure in the vertical well casing or cement, or the actual fracture of rock strata that allow for migration of gas from a variety of layer of the earth below to enter and foul our wells, springs and streams, or some other unexpected OOPS! event, ...we all are nervous and seeking answers.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting a study of this hydrofracking process especially as it is being applied in the new deep and horizontal well drilling into tight shales such as the Marcellus. [Hydraulic fracturing has been used for maybe 60 years in vertical well drilling, but this new, expanded use is presenting additional concerns due to the SCALE of the drilling now being done.]

Affected citizens in New York, Colorado, Pennsylvania and West Virginia are flocking to EPA hearings where input is being given.

At least two WV Highlands Conservancy members (Sue Braughton and

myself) were among the many citizens (some 130+) who commented at the Canonsburg hearing July 22, 2010.

Phew !

Second, What of EPA (US Environmental Protection Agency) and that agency's recent proclamation concerning [mountaintop removal and valley fill mine permits](#) ?

As much as I appreciate and am ever grateful for those within the agency who have recognized for more than a decade that mountaintop removal and valley fill strip mines are abhorrent ... and cause impacts well beyond the letter and intent of our nation's environmental laws (primarily Clean Water Act, Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)), I must admit the results of the Enhanced Coordinated Review and Permitting leaves me frowning.

Of the permits held up by EPA due to unanswered, unjustified reasons for advancing those permits which are obviously creating an unacceptable cumulative impact to water resources within and outside of the mining permit areas, several have been granted that make me more than slightly nervous.

The Hobet 45 permit - part of the now nearly 15,000 acre/ 25 square mile Hobet 21 complex overlapping the Boone/Lincoln County line and the Mud, Big Ugly and Little Coal River watersheds, as well as the Pine Creek permit in the Spruce drainage of the Little Coal River have been given the green light by EPA and are either granted or awaiting approval by the Corps.

Reading the mine development plans for these permits has been like a hot dagger to my heart. Granted valley fills per se have been eliminated. But, instead of leaving some semblance of the sides of valleys to subsequently fill, these new permits appear to allow mining everything clear to the valley floor then putting it all back together again like silly putty or building castles in the sand.

The wonders of engineering are to provide appropriate configurations of compacted rock within the backfilled area

(More and More on p. 13)

PLANNING FOR CANAAN VALLEY (Continued from p. 1)

heavy-handed management actions as clear cutting and mowing should be used only in extreme circumstances where the survival of an important rare species is in jeopardy.

Restoration of Red Spruce Ecosystem. As described in the draft CCP's Alternative 2, the preferred alternative, restoration of the red spruce ecosystem should be a principle goal. Refuge staff has provided important leadership that has led to the establishment of the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI). CASRI is a multi agency collaborative that is working to restore the red spruce ecosystem on a landscape scale. The Refuge land is a critical component of the historical high elevation red spruce forests that CASRI is working to restore. This collaborative effort is the most exciting and innovative conservation restoration project in West Virginia today. The Highlands Conservancy is proud to be an important contributor and partner in this effort. CVNWR should continue and expand on its work to restore the red spruce ecosystem on the Refuge and continue to provide leadership in its restoration across the mid-Appalachian Highlands.

Limited Vehicular/Motor Access. Roads destroy wildlife habitat and vehicles disturb wildlife and refuge visitors. There is pressure to open more of the Refuge to vehicular traffic for hunter access. We believe that increased vehicular access is not necessary to manage the deer herd. Judicious use of doe permits and season length would be more effective and far less disturbing and intrusive.

Habitat Manipulations Favoring Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species. The first priority for wildlife habitat management activities should be directed toward protecting and restoring habitat for rare threatened and endangered species. Preserving habitat for Cheat Mountain Salamander, managing grasslands for sparrow and bobolinks and planting riparian areas to shade streams are examples of management actions we would support to protect important species the Refuge was created to protect.

Hunting as a Management Tool. We support hunting as a tool for managing populations of game animals. In cases where predators are absent and populations are out of balance, special off-trail access for hunters to refuge lands is warranted to achieve management objectives aiming to return wildlife populations to historic numbers. We are opposed to the use of radio telemetry collared dogs to hunt bear. Bear dogs are unnecessary and inhumane. Dogs should not be allowed to hunt, or train to hunt, bears on the Refuge. Hunting of bear can be a valuable management tool to control bear populations but it is not necessary to use dogs to achieve the management goals.

Access for Wildlife Dependent Recreation. We support equal access to Refuge lands for wildlife dependant activities. It is unjust and wrong to allow some recreationists unlimited access to Refuge lands while denying that same access to other equally legitimate recreational activities. The current and proposed policy is discriminatory because it gives some recreational users preferential treatment and restricts others with equally credible and legitimate uses from having the same privileges.

Cooperate with Neighboring Agencies, Local Businesses and Residents. CASRI and the Heart of the Highlands Trail are two excellent examples of what can be achieved through cooperation and collaboration with neighbors.

Minimize Heavy-Handed Habitat Manipulation. The minimum tool rule concept should be applied to minimize disturbance,

vehicular and machine use. This important Forest Service rule suggests employing the least disturbing method possible to achieve management objectives. Natural succession and gentle restoration is preferred to mechanized actions such as cutting forests to artificially create and maintain "early successional" forests or mowing grasslands to prevent natural succession.

Reduction of Forest Fragmentation. Historical use and past activities on the lands currently making up the Refuge have left gaps and roads that are fragmenting the Refuge's forests. Efforts should be made to re-vegetate and reforest these areas to reduce forest fragmentation.

Inclusion and Expansion of the Proposed Research Natural Area. The Research Natural Area, as described in Alternative D, should be established and expanded across the Blackwater River and include all the wetlands to the west.

Prevention and Eradication of Invasive Species. The continuation and expansion of the Refuge's program to detect, prevent and eradicate invasive species is critical.

Increase Trail Connectivity. It should be the goal of the Refuge to increase trail connectivity on the Refuge and between the Refuge and neighboring lands. We support the idea of a north-south trail on the Refuge that would provide better connectivity between the Town of Davis, the Refuge and Canaan Valley State Park as long as trail construction avoids wetland or grassland areas and stays on old roads on the forested hillsides as much as possible. We support east-west trail connectivity by building a bridge across the Blackwater River to connect the Beall Tract to the Middle Ridge Trail and through the acquisition of the remaining lands in the northern portion of the Refuge purchase Area Boundary to enable the connection of the Brown Mountain Trail to A-Frame Road. We are opposed to an across-the Refuge trail built in the vicinity of the two railroad grades that once crossed the valley's wetlands. Neither are appropriate place to construct or maintain a trail.

Minimize Impacts But Do Not Close Ski Trails. We have read and support the position of White Grass Ski Touring Center regarding the future use of Three Mile and Powderline Trails. These are important winter access trails that also provide connectivity to adjoining Forest Service and State Park lands. We support research efforts to reduce or mitigate their impacts while keeping the trails open.

Increase Visitor Outreach and Education. Trailhead kiosks, the Visitor Center, volunteer opportunities, special events and programs, naturalist led outings, brochures, press and media work, interpretative trails and signage, traveling displays, native plant gardens, master naturalists programs, adopt-a-trail, research partnerships, etc. are all examples of the amazing visitor services and educational and outreach activities organized by the Refuge staff. We strongly support all these activities and other efforts to better inform and engage the public.

Leave a Legacy of hope for the future

Remember the Highlands Conservancy in your will. Plan now to provide a wild and wonderful future for your children and future generations. Bequests keep our organization strong and will allow your voice to continue to be heard. Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life.

Join Now !!!

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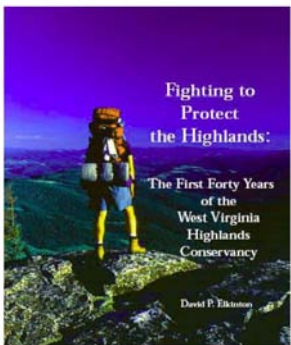
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Other	\$ 15		
Regular	\$ 25	\$ 35	\$ 50
Associate	\$ 50	\$ 75	\$ 100
Sustaining	\$100	\$ 150	\$ 200
Patron	\$ 250	\$ 500	\$ 500
Mountaineer	\$500	\$ 750	\$ 1000

Mail to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy PO Box 306 Charleston, WV 25321

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
Working to Keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful!

GREAT HISTORY BOOK NOW AVAILABLE



For the first time, a comprehensive history of West Virginia's most influential activist environmental organization. Author Dave Elkinton, the Conservancy's third president, and a twenty-year board member, not only traces the major issues that have occupied the Conservancy's energy, but profiles more than twenty of its volunteer leaders.

Learn about how the Conservancy stopped road building in Otter Creek, how a Corps of Engineers wetland permit denial saved Canaan Valley, and why Judge Haden restricted mountaintop removal mining. Also read Sayre Rodman's account of the first running of the Gauley, how college students helped save the Cranberry Wilderness, and why the highlands are under threat as never before.

With a foreword by former congressman Ken Hechler, the book's chapters follow the battle for wilderness preservation, efforts to stop many proposed dams and protect free-flowing rivers, the 25-year struggle to save the Canaan Valley, how the Corridor H highway was successfully re-routed around key environmental landmarks, and concluding with the current controversy over wind farm development. One-third of the text tells the story of the Conservancy's never-ending fight to control the abuses of coal mining, especially mountaintop removal mining. The final chapter examines what makes this small, volunteer-driven organization so successful.


From the cover by photographer Jonathan Jessup to the 48-page index, this book will appeal both to Conservancy members and friends and to anyone interested in the story of how West Virginia's mountains have been protected against the forces of over-development, mismanagement by government, and even greed.

518 pages, 6x9, color cover, published by Pocahontas Press
 To order your copy for \$24.95, plus \$3.00 shipping, visit the Conservancy's website, wvhighlands.org, where payment is accepted by credit card and PayPal.

Or write: WVHC, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Proceeds support the Conservancy's ongoing environmental projects.

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Book Premium With Membership

Although *Fighting to Protect the Highlands, the First 40 Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy* normally sells for \$24.95, we are offering it as a premium to our members. Anyone who adds \$10 to the membership dues listed on the How to Join membership form (right up there ) will receive the history book for free. Just note on the membership form that you wish to take advantage of this offer.

This offer is available to current members as well as new members. Current members may add \$10.00 to the amount they pay when they renew their memberships and receive a book as well.

BROCHURES

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has joined with the Sierra Club, Coal River Mountain Watch, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Appalachian Voices, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Keeper of the Mountains Foundation and Christians for the Mountains have put together a new brochure entitled **"Mountaintop Removal Destroys Our Homeplace STOP THE DEVASTATION!"** For a copy send a self-addressed stamped envelope to Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314.

Quantities are available for teachers, civic and religious groups and anyone who can distribute them.

A HISTORY OF WHITE GRASS AND THE REFUGE

By Chip Chase and Laurie Little

We helped support the WV Highlands Conservancy in the 1970's and became aware of Canaan Valley and pumped storage project battle. [Davis Power Project] We relocated our ski and restaurant business from Virginia there in the early 1980's and have maintained and leased cross country and snowshoe trails on the Kelly Elkins and Graham tracts since 1981.

Chip Chase, owner and founder of White Grass was well read on the subject of Canaan and lead discussions in the area as well as in the schools through the tutelage of local experts State Park Naturalist Bill Moore and original Highlands Conservancy founders David and Linda Cooper Elkinton. We led a canoe trip with Congressman Alan Mollohan and family through the north end of the valley paddling up support for the Refuge in the late 80's. Some of us worked with Dr. Ed Michael, WV wildlife professor in charge of much of the environmental research for the Davis Power Project. Bob Putz, a leading official for the USF&WS brought the (then) Director of the US Fish & Wildlife Service, John Turner and family, to Canaan one Christmas to XC ski and we guided them atop Weiss Knob just before the first purchases and again added some personal influence toward the successful formation of the Refuge.

We continued our access agreement along the Kelly Elkins tract with the Conservation Fund and were told we had to abandon several trails and mileage when the Fish and Wildlife took possession of the property the following year. At the same time we requested continuation of our established Gateway to the Refuge snowshoe hikes we had been leading into the Harr tract. We expanded the number of free educational tours, offered more varying subjects with expert leadership and have been seeing a growing number of participants ever since.

A large effort was undertaken in taking down and cleaning up old rusty fence lines along Freeland Road bordering the original Harr tract as well as helping with other Refuge projects

Our involvement with the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge began in earnest in the early nineties with the initial formation of a Refuge support group. The first meeting was held at Chip Chase's house with subsequent larger gatherings at the White Grass Ski Center. We appealed to the Tucker County Commission at every meeting for a year until their decision to support was made. We attended and commented at many of the initial community open houses and helped support USFWS biologist Chris Clower and Jim Rawson from the WV DNR.

Chip was one of the first President's of the Friends of the 500th. Since the beginning we have been one of the strongest and more involved local business supporters. To this day we remain a cooperative neighbor, friend, and strong volunteer force.

As the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge finalizes its Comprehensive Conservation Plan, some of the Highlands Conservancy's strongest supporters have been chiming in. They include the White Grass Ski Touring Center and Café. This summary of their involvement with the Refuge over the years was a part of its comments on the Draft Plan.



Chip Chase and his wife Laurie Little, proprietors of White Grass Ski Touring Center and Café. Photo courtesy of Diane Hinkle, Foundation Development Director for the Tucker Community Foundation. The Tucker Community Foundation serves as a source for local charitable giving and social investment. It is a tax-exempt public charity serving thousands of people who share a common concern – sustaining and improving the quality of life in the Tucker County region. You can learn more about the Tucker Community Foundation by visiting <http://tuckerfoundation.whatsupwv.com/about/>

**Send us a post card, drop us a line,
stating point of view**

Please email any poems, letters, commentaries to the VOICE editor at johnmcferrin@aol.com or real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.



West Virginia Mountain Odyssey



Outings, Education and Beyond 🇺🇸

Sat. Sept. 4 to Mon. Sept. 6 ~ Backpacking on Red Creek/ Roaring/ Flatrock Plains of Monongahela National Forest. This is one of the highest, most rugged, and most scenic parts of the West Va. Highlands. Lots of spectacular views. Prior backpacking experience is required because the Plains are no place for beginners - even for leisurely trips like this one. We will cover only about 16 miles total, because there is so much to see and do that we will need lots of time to explore. We will start at the upper trailhead of South Prong Trail, then take Hidden Passage Trail to Seneca Meadows where hopefully we can camp at the Rim campsite right on the Eastern Continental Divide. This is one of the most spectacular campsites on the MNF. The tenting area offers a 3000 vertical ft. view of the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac. Seneca Rocks, the Fore Knobs and some remote high mountain pastures are also far below us. Further east can be seen most of North Fork Mountain, and numerous ridges beyond to the Shenandoah Mountains on the far horizon. A view into the deep, steep-walled, wild canyon of the headwaters of Roaring Creek is near the water supply. Coyotes may serenade us in the late evening. Day 2 will take us up Roaring Plains Trail to the Spruce Campsite on the rim of the deep, wild and steep-walled Long Run. It, too, is on the Eastern Continental Divide. Mt. Porte Crayon and Haystack Knob can be seen along the rim of Long Run, and the venturesome may attempt an ascent of Mt. Porte Crayon (West Va's 7th highest mountain). The "roaring winds" are often experienced in the Spruce Campsite in late evening. Not far from the campsite is an overlook that looks down on Dolly Sods Wilderness, Cabin Mountain, Canaan Valley, and Allegheny Front. Day 3 will take us down Boar's Nest Trail and across South Fork of Red Creek (water levels permitting). Weather (even summer weather) on this high part of the Eastern Continental Divide can be severe. We need to be cautious. Limit: 10. Contact Bruce Sundquist at 724-327-8737 or bsundquist1@windstream.net. A detailed trip sheet plus road directions plus topo maps will be provided.

Saturday-Monday, September 04 to 06, 2010 (Labor Day Weekend). Roaring Plains Base Camp Backpack and Day Hike, MNF, WV. Backpack in 2.5 miles and set up a base camp at the Hidden Passage. Day 2, strenuous 12-14 mile day hike along the canyon rim. Lots of boulder fields and fantastic views. Day 3, Backpack back out the way we came in. Pre-registration required. Contact Mike Juskelis at 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

Saturday-Tuesday, September 18 to 21, 2010. Lake Sherwood, MNF, WV. Car Camping and Day Hiking. The first hike (11 miles/moderate) will start at the campground and will follow the eastern shore of the lake and the western ridge of the valley. A short drive will be required to set up an 11 mile, moderate shuttle hike through the newly proclaimed Big Draft Wilderness Area featuring the beautiful Anthony Creek. Pre-registration required. Campsites are first come, first served. Contact Mike Juskelis at 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

Saturday September 25: Red Spruce Restoration volunteer opportunity, 10 am at Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Join us and help plant 5,000 red spruce seedlings. Contact Dave Saville at (304) 284-9548 for more information.

Saturday-Monday (or Tuesday), October 09 to 11 (or 13), 2010. Cooper's Rock State Forest, WV. Car Camping and Day Hiking. As of now this is a three day trip with an 8 mile circuit hike within the park to visit the Cheat River and a vista. It is possible this will be extended an extra day if more good hiking is close by. Pre-registration and campsite reservation is required. Contact Mike Juskelis at 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

Open Dates: Visit Kayford Mountain south of Charleston to see mountain top removal (MTR) up close and hear Larry Gibson's story about how he saved his mountain, now almost totally surrounded by MTR. Bring lunch for a picnic on Larry's mountain. Call in advance to schedule. Julian Martin (304) 342-8989; martinjul@aol.com or Larry Gibson (304) 542-1134; (304) 549-3287.

MOUNTAIN BIKING IN WEST VIRGINIA

By Dave Cooper

I have gone skiing at Snowshoe in northern West Virginia many times. It's a really fun place to ski, and probably the best skiing in the eastern United States south of New York. During the weekdays, the prices at Snowshoe are fairly reasonable and the crowds are tolerable. Weekends and holidays are another story.

Snowshoe, unlike most ski resorts, is developed on top of the mountain, not at the base, so anyone driving through scenic, rural, serene Pocahontas County, West Virginia, would never see the resort unless they took the six mile drive to the top of the mountain. Many rural West Virginians might be shocked to see just how massive this resort is: gigantic, shiny new condominium buildings, upscale restaurants and expensive shops spread out for several miles along the top of the ridge. There is also a smaller resort called Silver Creek that is located down the mountain. Silver Creek has a huge lodge, an indoor-outdoor pool and is geared towards families and kids.

Snowshoe is owned by a large corporation called Intrawest, which also operates well-known ski resorts in Canada, Vermont and Colorado such as Steamboat, Whistler, and Stratton. According to an Intrawest website called Snowshoe Homes, "in 1997, their "Forever Wild" vision led to the planning, design and construction of this true multi-season, mountaintop resort village, and a celebration of wilderness adventure on and around the mountain."

How on earth Intrawest can get away with calling a massive, multi-million dollar ski-condo complex "forever wild" is beyond me. That's just absurd.

But I wanted to see what Snowshoe was like during the summer. Snowshoe has a lot of events throughout the year, including chili cook-offs, dirt-bike and ATV racing, Jeep Jamborees, bluegrass festivals, and mountain biking. From looking at the websites, I was under the impression that people could mountain bike down the mountain and then take the chair lift back up. But when I arrived on a Wednesday in June, the slopes were all roped off and marked "Closed," and none of the chair lifts were operating. I went to the office that was supposed to provide information about mountain biking trails and hours of operation for the chair lifts, but the office was closed. I guess I should have done a little more research, but the information on the website was confusing and contradictory.

Many of the shops and restaurants were closed too, and the whole place felt kind of lonely, even desolate. But it was very peaceful and quiet, the view from atop the mountain was beautiful, the weather was absolutely perfect, and the sun was shining, so I set out to explore Snowshoe on my bike.

There are a number of maintenance roads that emanate from the top of Snowshoe, and I had fun riding down them, and looking at the big snow-grooming equipment. I rode through the woods down to Silver Creek following a utility right-of-way, and rode on some of the slopes at Silver Creek, which were also marked "closed." I ended up riding through some fields of daisies and it was really a lovely experience. There are some dirt trails on the mountain slopes too, and some roads are marked as cycling trails, but without a good trail map or someone to tell me where to go, I mostly fumbled the day. I also saw some of the extreme mountain biking trails along the western slopes, but they were far more difficult than anything I could ride. I guess this is where the experts ride during the four weekend mountain biking events listed on the Snowshoe calendar. There is also a mountain bike park somewhere on the mountain, but I could never find it.

I was intrigued by Intrawest's efforts to develop a true "multi-season" resort. A major financial goal of ski operators is to build and sell pricy townhomes and condos. I suspect they make more money selling real estate than they do selling lift tickets. But most people are reluctant to buy property that they would only use for a few weeks a year, so Intrawest attempts to market Snowshoe as an all-season resort with fun events throughout the year. There is a swimming pool, and there is also a new suburban-style church, to make people feel right at home. But if you lived on the mountain, where would you go to buy groceries? Pocahontas County is very rural, and there isn't really a town nearby.

So who buys these all townhomes and condos? Rich doctors and lawyers, who buy them as investments and then rent them out to skiers. I was informed that one large house on the mountain, which could sleep 29 people, rented for \$2400 per night. Not per week – \$2400 per night!

There are also some really nice, attractive private homes with decks offering spectacular mountain views. The day I was there, only about 20 percent of them seemed to be occupied. I fantasized about rolling out a sleeping pad and spending the night on the deck of one of these unoccupied homes.

It's a bit of a stretch to call Snowshoe a "village," and it's not a community any more than Disneyland is, but I give Intrawest credit for trying. It would be nice if this huge development was really pumping a lot of money into the West Virginia tourism economy, but somehow I suspect that most of the money is actually going to Intrawest.

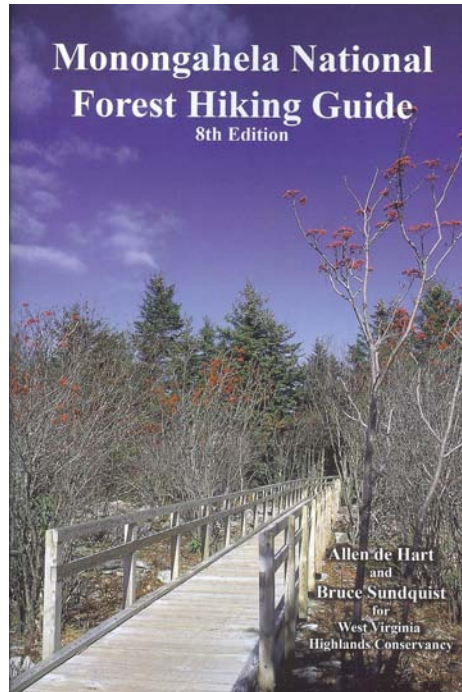
Is going to Snowshoe in the summer a worthwhile trip? The mountains are beautiful and with the high elevation, the weather is delightful. Perhaps some of the festivals might be fun.

There was a big dirt bike/four wheeling event scheduled for that weekend, and when I rode back to the top of the mountain, they were all starting to rev their motors, so I decided to leave "Forever Wild" and head down to Cass to check out the Greenbrier River Rail-Trail. I will write about that next month. The Mountaintop Removal Road Show

Note: When Mr. Cooper is not mountain biking, he does the Mountaintop Removal Road Show, an educational presentation about mountaintop removal coal mining. See <http://www.mountainroadshow.com/> ;<http://www.youtube.com/user/mountainjustice>. For a volunteer presentation in your community, contact him at 608 Allen Ct., Lexington, KY 40505,(859) 299 5669. Email: davecooper928@yahoo.com).

Speakers Available !!!!!

Does your school, church or civic group need a speaker or program presentation on a variety of environmental issues? Contact Julian Martin at 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314, or Martinjul@aol.com, or 304-342-8989.



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By Allen de Hart and Bruce Sundquist

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Price: \$20.00 from the same address.

EIS SCOPING COMMENTS FOR PATH END AUGUST 20TH

By Frank Young

The Potomac Appalachian Transmission Highline (PATH) would run for over 270 miles from the John E. Amos coal-fired power plant in western West Virginia to a massive new transformer substation near Kempton, Maryland.

The path of PATH cuts across several miles of National Forest and National Park property. The National Park Service (NPS) is the lead federal agency charged with conducting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The National Park Service is currently considering the "scope" of the Environmental Impact Statement. The Park Service's decision on the "scope" will determine whether the focus of the Environmental Impact Statement is broad or narrow. The coal and power corporations pushing the transmission line would prefer a very narrow scope addressing only the impact of constructing the line within the federal

property boundaries (a few miles at most).

Opponents of PATH have pointed out that the transmission line will have extensive environmental impacts, the largest of which are caused by the increased mining and burning of toxic coal that will result if the line is put into operation.

The NPS coordinator for the PATH EIS process announced at a recent Tucker County public scoping meeting that the deadline for public comments on the scope of the PATH EIS will be extended to August 20, 2010.

STOP Path leaders advise that public comments should be concise and clear. Don't forget to emphasize the fact that the scope of the PATH EIS needs to be expanded to cover the entire almost 300 miles long power line.

Based on past Court rulings, those who argue that NPS must take a "hard look" at all of the environmental impacts of the project and their cumulative effect would

seem to be standing on solid legal ground.

We also need to educate the feds about the fact that PATH isn't needed anyway and that the best alternative for the PATH line is the one in which PATH doesn't get built.

Public comments on the scope for the PATH related EIS can be sent to:
 Morgan McCosh Elmer, Project Manager
 NPS Denver Service Center – Planning
 12795 W Alameda Pkwy
 PO Box 25287
 Denver CO 80225
 (303) 969-2317
 fax: 303-969-2920
Morgan_Elmer@nps.gov

NORTH FORK MOUNTAIN DESERVES WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

By Dan Berger

Gotta tell you my friends, I am usually the last person that likes the federal government to come in and tell me what I can or cannot do. In fact, I don't like any governmental entity directing me to do this or not to do that.

But I have once again been sucked into the vortex of working on another conservation issue in our beautiful Grant County. As you may have read or heard there is a proposal to make North Fork Mountain a federal Wilderness designation.

Now, before I go on, I must be honest with you folks and disclose to you that I live in the shadow of North Fork Mountain and own property on the North Fork River. Why does this matter you ask? Well, it appears by my research that in almost all cases, property located adjacent or nearby Wilderness designations eventually increase in value at a higher rate than those next to "regular" national forest lands. A good thing for landowners and property-tax coffers alike.

As a lifelong conservationist and lover of everything outdoors, I investigate land and water issues fairly thoroughly before I get involved. And a proposal to make our beloved North Fork Mountain a Wilderness area is one such time.

When I was contacted by Mike Costello, of the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition, the coordinator for this project, I immediately had numerous questions and concerns. Shocker, eh? To his credit, he didn't hang up on me, he didn't cuss at me and he didn't call me names. All good signs in my book.

Here are some of the questions I asked Mr. Costello and his answers:

1) Me: "Will the Wilderness designation prevent hunting or fishing on North Fork Mountain?"

Him: "No, everyone will be able to continue to hunt and fish as before. Hunting and fishing are important uses to us, as West Virginians, and wilderness on North Fork Mountain doesn't eliminate the opportunities for these traditions to continue, since all current trails and roads can still be used for access."

2) Me: "Will this prevent the state from stocking trout up and down North Fork River since the river is one of the proposed boundary lines for the Wilderness area?"

Him: "No. Trout stocking will be permitted to continue. And at your request and to alleviate concerns of local residents and businesses that depend on trout fishing, we moved the proposed boundary line so none of the river is in the Wilderness designation."

3) Me: "Will the Wilderness designation prevent local or federal officials from putting out forest fires that threaten private property?"

Him: "No. If the need for fire suppression arises, construction of fire roads, and fire breaks are permitted. The Wilderness Act specifically states

that these measures can be taken to suppress fire in Wilderness areas, and managing agencies can engage in this activity when determined necessary, especially if private property and structures or human lives are threatened."

Me: "So, if nothing changes in terms of hunting, fishing or hiking, why does North Fork Mountain need to become a Wilderness designation?"

Him: "It will maintain the area's unparalleled scenery and permanently protect North Fork Mountain from the uses that threaten to diminish its wild, natural character. In addition, it opens up a significant economic opportunity for Grant County. Wilderness designations have been proven to increase eco-tourism for area communities, creating jobs and increasing revenue for local businesses and governments."

Now, Mr. Costello is a nice guy, knows his stuff, and appears honest and forthright. Having said that, I did what President Ronald Reagan said about his dealings with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, "Trust but verify."

So, for verification, I called some of my congressional contacts in Washington, D.C. as well as friends at the U.S. Forest Service. I am proud to report, Mr. Costello wasn't fibbing on the facts.

From a conservation perspective, I like the idea that if North Fork Mountain is made a Wilderness designation that the federal government can't sell or lease the land to gas drillers and mining operators. This will prevent fracking chemical spills and other possible destruction associated with those operations. In addition, rare plant and animal life will be preserved and extremely unique rock and land structures will be maintained. And being a Wilderness area protects forever our hunting and fishing way of life in this part of Grant County.

From a business perspective, I strongly believe that Grant County is a terrific tourist gem and is just beginning to see its true potential. If my research on this issue from other parts of the country remains the same for our county, making North Fork Mountain a Wilderness area would help attract even more folks seeking to explore Wild & Wonderful West Virginia. Cha-ching!

This past July 4th weekend, I sat in the North Fork River playing with my 6-year old daughter Shelby, and gave all this Wilderness designation stuff some serious thinkin' and noodlin'. On occasion I looked up at the cliffs on North Fork Mountain and all its magnificent rock formations and admired their ancient pressurized designs... gigantic rocks seemingly bent by the hand of God. And then I glanced over at Shelby, the love of my life, yeah I decided, North Fork Mountain is worth saving for future generations.

Dan Berger is a lifelong conservationist and outdoorsman and lives in Cabins.

BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

By John McFerrin

In many ways the Summer Board Meeting was more of the same. Beth Little reported that our membership was holding steady. We had a treasurer's report that showed us not rolling in dough but having enough to keep paying our bills and doing what we are doing.

The Board did get to hear about some exciting things that we are doing. Marilyn Shoenfeld reported on the comments that the made on the management plan for the Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge (see story on p. 1). We talked about the comments that we had made on the proposed changes in the West Virginia water quality standards (see story on p. 3). Frank Young talked about the progress (or lack thereof) of the PATH powerline (see story on p. 10). Cindy Rank talked about the various mining companies who are failing to meet their responsibilities and what we are doing about it. Her story on page 4 covers some of that territory.

We puzzled over an enduring conundrum: if not coal, what? There was general consensus that the mining and burning of coal imposes a terrible cost on the environment. There are new and not so new technologies around that can and will supply electricity. There was discussion of whether we should try to steer public policy toward a particular technology, including the question of whether we would be able to pick the most promising one or the one with the least environmental cost. With such a complex question before us, we made no progress toward an answer.



Volunteers from Brooks Bird Club conducted bird and plant surveys on and near Invenergy's Beech Ridge wind turbine facility in Greenbrier County during late May and early June. WVHC board member Bob Henry Baber loaned housing accommodations for the birders. In this photo, five past presidents of BBC are present: G. Eddy, T. Fox, D. Fox, J. Whitaker, and C. Ellis.

Photo by Jane Whitaker

MORE FROM PRESIDENT HUGH (Continued from p. 2)

at in an article she wrote for the *Potomac Appalachian* way back in 1959. "A Year with the Bushwhackers" chronicled the adventures of the various PATC members who had tried "a new type of trip—leaving Washington after work (eating on the way) the second Friday of every month." They would backpack into an area, leave the packs in camp for exploratory day hikes, share food and equipment. "Enjoyment, not pound-miles hiked, will be the watchword."

The idea had come out of a discussion about "gingering up the club." A core group had agreed that "a well-led hike over a well-scouted and well-maintained trail no longer really satisfied us. . . . In the early days of the club, members had found their challenge in creating the [Appalachian] Trail but that job was finished. We would have to go on and look for ours. Perhaps we could find it by exploring off the beaten track."

As it happened, in their first year they had not done much real bushwhacking. "However, as the group grows in experience, as we move into country with fewer trails,

and as winter approaches so that it is easier to move across country, we hope to do more of it."

The trail enthusiast yearned to roam off-trail. Now, most of us are happy to rely on "a well-scouted and well-maintained trail," and our experience inspires support for conserving the country we travel through. Jeannette counted on that. It may be worth adding that fifty years ago, there weren't as many people in the woods. For many reasons, it's better if we stay on marked trails.

But a few will be moved to answer Jeannette's call: "If you want to get to a definite point by the shortest route you will be disappointed in us, but if you have a large bump of curiosity and like to stop and look at things or run down side trails, we hope you will come and join us."

What we're hoping for today is that you'll then want to take the next step: inspired by Jeannette's example, help keep those trails open so others' eyes are opened to our public lands.

DO THIS! DO IT NOW!!

The West Virginia Environmental Council has scheduled its 2010 Annual Fall Convention for October 8th - 10th at Camp Pioneer in Beverly, WV. One of the things it does at the annual meeting is discuss and begin to establish its priorities for the upcoming Legislative Session.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is a long time supporter of the West Virginia Environmental Council. We need to make known our priorities for issues that need to be addressed by the Legislature.

Please submit those comments via email to Frank Young, chair of WVEC's legislative affairs committee, no later than Sept. 1, so that he has plenty of time to compile them for our October meeting. fyoung@mountain.net

The participation and suggestions of the Conservancy and its members are important. Please send ideas to Frank and consider attending the Fall Convention at Camp Pioneer. There will be more details to come and they will be posted on our web site at <http://www.wvecouncil.org/>

MORE ABOUT COAL, GAS, AND EVERYTHING (Continued from p. 4)

that roughly replicate the perched aquifers so many of us rely on to feed our springs and headwater streams through periods of draught and dry weather.

For the Corps' part, the agency is to write a more comprehensive guidance about mitigation and re-establishing both form and function in re-created streams in backfilled 'mine-through' areas of permits

....

Margaret Palmer, Bruce Wallace, Ben Stout and others have argued eloquently in one courtroom hearing after another about the lack of function in these recreated streams even if water actually does eventually flow over rock and newly created riffle.

The ecosystems and bugs and leaf litter and critters large and small that make headwater streams the ecological treasures that they are have yet to be re-created or re-introduced anywhere and so it appears even the most sympathetic EPA to date is still allowing permits on a wing and a prayer that the future will be different with a few tweaks here and there.

THIRD, The U.S. Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM for short) has agreed with their sister agencies, EPA and CORPS, to do something within its program to address the issues arising from litigation these past dozen years and to address the controversial stream buffer zone rule rarely enforced then totally decimated in the eleventh hour of the Bush Administration.

Transparency is the new watchword of OSM as well as the other agencies. Unfortunately, most transparent of all is the buffer zone rule itself which has all but disappeared amid a morass of nice sounding words and sincere suggestions that better CHIAs (Cumulative Hydrological Impact Assessments), more careful evaluation of the mine plans and a variety of other tweaks of the Surface Mine Act is all that is required to rein in the destructive mining known as mountaintop removal/valley fill mining.

I have little hope that the public meetings being held as I write this article will provide much more than what OSM has already provided..... But I suppose miracles can happen.

FOURTH: THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (CORPS) --- I'd like to leave this section blank, because that's pretty much what we've gotten from the Corps these past thirty years, but duty bound I should at least elaborate a bit.

Dropping the Nationwide Permit #21 for coal mining activities is a welcome recognition of how these permits have heretofore been used to allow the large, non-"minimal" impact on streams of valley fills and huge strip mines. (Judge Goodwin recognized that years ago here in southern West Virginia, but our neighboring states will now have to at least partially mend their ways.)

From earlier tales of how the agency (i.e. Corps) "just oozed into" this permitting for mining operations and have since moved to more recent permit adjustments, I feel the Corps has been dragging its regulatory feet with regard to mining.

The agency has recently been convinced/coerced into compiling a guidance for working in streams that is meant to provide adequate guidance for 'mitigation' that will lead to re-creating viable headwater streams, stream energies and functions similar to those that have been destroyed, mined-through, buried or temporarily impacted.

FINALLY: PATH ---- I grew up in Pittsburgh when the bridge to nowhere was being built..... To me the PATH 765 kV transmission line is a path to nowhere, a blighted blip upon the land and hearts of our people and a speed bump in the road to the real path to a visionary future where West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, and so many other states are no longer so beholdin' to coal fired energy production that we are willing to sacrifice our souls for the plentiful black-gold.

And, so for now....

I lay me down to sleep and pray the lord our world to keep.... 'Cause we surely aren't doing such a hot job after all.

.....Wonder if that lord prefers streams 'filled' with waste rock.....or 're-created' from scratch and leftover mountain parts?

BUMPER STICKERS

To get free **I ♥ Mountains** bumper sticker(s), send a SASE to Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314. Slip a dollar donation (or more) in with the SASE and get 2 bumper stickers. Businesses or organizations wishing to provide bumper stickers to their customers/members may have them free. (Of course if they can afford a donation that will be gratefully accepted.)

Also available are the new green-on-white oval **Friends of the Mountains** stickers. Let Julian know which (or both) you want.



CAR CAMPING/DAY HIKING IN MOUNT ROGERS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

By Michael Juskelis

The camping: The sites were all flat, large, well maintained and shaded by mature Hemlocks and hardwoods. The temperatures were cooler than expected (mid to high 70s during the day and mid-60s at night). The days were sunny but we had a lot of rain on Tuesday night. The restrooms were meticulously kept. Unlike our previous trip to PA, we had no invasive varmint issues (Raccoons). No one had a single complaint.

Hike 1: Appalachian Trail-Iron Mountain Loop. Last year we had backpacked and day hiked the ever popular Mount Rogers/Grayson Highlands area, covering most of the major trails there. This year, in a search of hikes with more solitude, we decided to do hikes in the less popular Iron Mountain/Hurricane Mountain area. I set up the three hikes we were to do by order of difficulty doing the longest/hardest one first and the shortest/easiest one last.

Today we convened at a trailhead in the Beartree Lake Recreation Area to complete a 14.0 mile circuit with 2720 feet of elevation gain using the Beartree Gap, Appalachian, Feathercamp Branch and Iron Mountain trails. The hike started with us crossing the dam of Beartree Lake before turning south and climbing to reach the Appalachian Trail. We had views of Mount Rogers, White Top, and Chestnut mountains along the way.

Initially the Appalachian Trail was on a relatively flat RR grade but soon gave way to a series of well graded switchbacks that took us up to a ridge line with very little effort. The next 2 miles provided relatively flat walking through luscious green hardwoods, Rhododendron and Eastern Hemlocks. One could see where there were once great open

views of the ridges in northern North Carolina and Tennessee but they are now, at least during the summer, partially obstructed.

The descent down to White Top Laurel Creek was through a seemingly endless stretch of switchbacks, but stopped short of reaching the pretty stream. For the most part we would only get partial glimpses of it as we hiked high above it towards Rt 58.

We left the Appalachian Trail shortly after taking a lunch break at Straight Branch, turning right onto the blue blazed Feathercamp Branch trail. In the first 0.5 miles we crossed this beautiful gurgling stream wrapped in Rhododendron thickets 8 times before climbing up above it.

We gained about 1500 feet over 2 miles before joining the Iron Mountain trail and taking a break at the Sandy Flats shelter. This used to be part of the Appalachian Trail before it was rerouted to the section we hiked earlier in the day.

The stretch of trail to Shaw's Gap was a pretty easy piece of ridge walking with the mountain falling away pretty steeply on either side of the trail. From there we descended gradually on the Beartree Gap trail, at this point an old haul road. The further we dropped in elevation the more we became encapsulated in a jungle of Rhododendron and Hemlock, passing a nice wildlife pond as the trail flattened out.

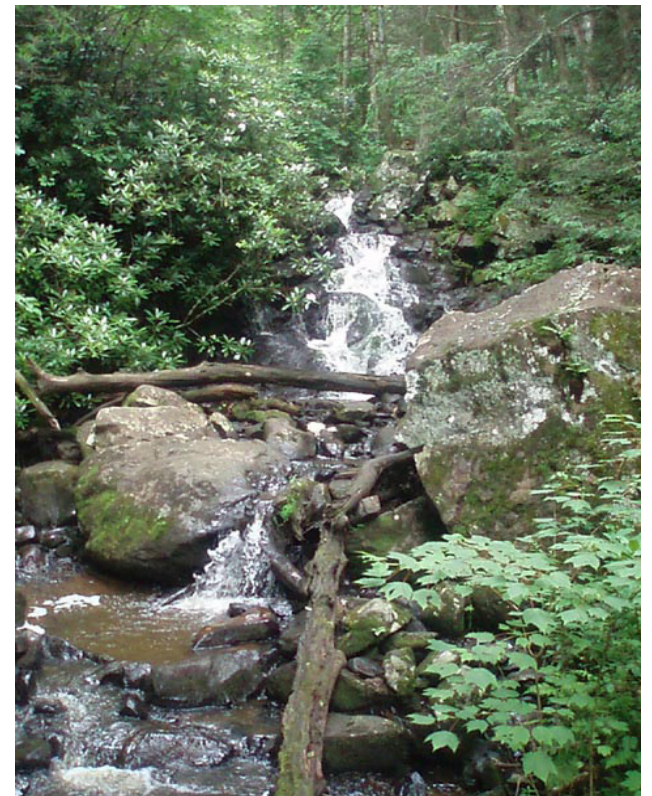
We completed the hike a little after 5:00 and headed back to camp for showers, dinner and fireside chat.

Hike 2: Rowland Creek Falls-Jerry's Run Loop, a 12 mile circuit while climbing 2500+ feet. Although the distance between camp and the trailhead was only about thirteen

miles the route was very circuitous. It took us 30 minutes to reach the trailhead.

We climbed along the Rowland Creek trail for about two miles, navigating one nasty blowdown along the way that had obliterated the location of the trail on the other side. The views of the chutes and mini-falls were very nice, but we were high above them. This created a sense of separation from what we were viewing, almost as if we were watching TV.

There was a trail down to the base of the focal point of the hike, a one hundred foot set of cascades, but the footing looked tricky and I wasn't about to try it with a 80 pound



Comers Creek Falls Photo by Mike Juskelis



A view of Mt Rogers and White Top from the Beartree Gap trail
Photo by Mike Juskelis

dog pulling me. We took a brief break at the end of the trail before joining the Old FR84 Trail. About 20 yards in, I saw my first black bear in over two years.

Initially this trail was narrow and engulfed in Rhododendron (like so many of the trails up here) but soon turned into a wide old forest road as the name would imply. It was pretty easy walking with only gradual increases in elevation but after a while it developed this feeling of ... sameness. About six miles into the hike and 4 miles into what was almost becoming a boring road walk we

(More on the next page)

THE REST OF THE HIKE (Continued from previous page)

took a lunch break.

About a mile after lunch we happily turned off onto the Jerry's Run trail. This was another one of those wonderful Rhodo tunnels that follow an invisible yet very audible stream. We followed it for about two miles until the trail finally turned and crossed the run.

The last three miles of the trail became another old forest road. It climbed a bit before leveling off and turning sharply to the right before drawing a bee line back to the forest road we were parked on. Sadly, towards the end, I noticed that the once magnificent Hemlock forest was infested with its archrival, the Woolly Adelgid. Many of the largest ones are now mere gray skeletons.

Hike 3: Comers Creek Falls/Iron Mountain Loop, the shortest/easiest hike of the trip at 8.9 miles and 1870 feet of elevation gain.

It also turned out to be the best. It was the coolest day of the three and pretty bug-free. The climb up the Dickey Gap Trail and then the AT was very gradual. We could hear the creek hundreds of feet below us but could not see it. It was running very strong. Soon the AT dropped us down to the foot of the namesake waterfall. The trail crossed the creek here on a sturdy bridge but we rested here for a while, enjoying the sights and sounds, and then backtracked a bit to take

the Comers Creek trail to its junction with the Iron Mountain trail.

Here we found one of the nicest campsites bracketed above and below by small waterfalls. We finished our climb up the Iron Mountain trail and passed through a stile to find a Cold Mountain-esque view in front of us. It was very easy to ascertain that we would be hiking through active pastures as we zig-zagged through numerous cow pies, stopping occasionally to take in the views of the ridge to the south of us.

As we neared the end of the pasture land we spotted a lone Black Angus steer in the forest ... then another ... then 2 more ... OH MAN!!! We were suddenly in the middle of a herd of 40 head of cattle, calves and all. I had learned what to do if confronted by a black bear in the woods but what does one do in this situation? PHyker, still on lead, began to yelp at the calves, figuring they were small enough for her to play with, and all but yanked my left arm out of its socket. The calves immediately began running through the woods as the cows bleated for them to come back.

We hiked as fast as we could until on the other side of the last stile, the entire time listening to the cows giving us a piece of their minds. From there the trail followed an old forest road (Oh no! Not another one?)

but only for about 0.5 miles. Along the way we found an open field that offered a great panorama of a distant ridge with a pastoral setting in the foreground, something I wasn't expecting. Shortly after this, the trail turned off onto a footpath returning us to a feeling of being in the wilderness.

The trail got pretty sloppy but only for a short distance as a horse trail joined the route. We followed the AT as it descended along another one of those streams that preferred to play hide and seek except at a couple of exceptional campsites we passed.

The trail curved away from the stream and then exited the old haul road we had been following onto a nice piece of side-hill trail. For two miles we cruised along stopping occasionally to take in our surroundings (and yes, to allow one more cool down break for P as we crossed the same stream we had been following earlier.) From there it was a short and sweet descent on the Dickey Gap trail back to Ted's van.

We had hiked a total of 35 miles in three days and climbed over 7000 Feet by the time it was all said and done. We drove back to camp for a simple but filling meal and another nice campfire.

The Hamburg Challenge

Dear Voice readers,

I confess to having divested myself and departed nearly two years ago from my 30-year stewardship for some WV hillsides. Nevertheless, in February, 2010, in these pages I nearly begged for suggestions as to ways in which exploitation of wind energy was more environmentally destructive than exploitation of coal. In fact, no one cared to make such a suggestion. While wind does have its costs, I still defy anyone to show how they are worse than coal -- be it deep or mountain top.

In all that time, the only understandable reply dealt with the already accepted fact that coal is [currently] the choice for base load and that wind and solar can [currently] provide only primarily for more peak loads. I suggest that the electricity distribution system is currently reorganizing to recognize the necessity of dealing with multiple producers as well as multiple users. Battery technology appears to be potentially progressing at rates similar to what computers have done for decades -- as have photovoltaics, etc.

So in an attempt to keep my hands into the WV situation: What I'd really be interested in learning is how many folk who are so opposed to large-scale, commercial wind-energy have installed their own alternative systems -- rather than being plugged into coal?

Please do contact me with just the basics of your own local system: households served; financial, real goods [kwh, bats, flying squirrels] costs and savings; or whatever criteria you might consider important.

Most Sincerely,

Bob Hamburg

bhanomalous7@gmail.com



“ ... AND THAT’S WHY THEY CALL IT WILDERNESS!”

By Michael Juskelis

07/10-12/2010, Cranberry Wilderness North Backpack: The timing for this trip couldn't have been better. The east coast was in a drought with daytime temps in the triple digits for three consecutive days and no rain in several days. The weatherman promised Richwood, WV daytime temps for our trek in the upper 70s to low 80s with nighttime temps in the high 50s to low 60s. To add to the forecast the area recently experienced just enough rain to revitalize the streams along the Middle Branch of the Williams River.

Doc, Treebeard-IM, Shortstack, Linda, Daryl and I started up the Middle Fork Trail at a leisurely pace. With only 2.6 miles to hike there was no rush. We took several stops to identify flowers (Agrimony, Black Cohosh, Wild Basil, Bee Balm and more) and to enjoy the views along the river. We reached Big Beechy by 5:30 and quickly got camp set up. Doc, Shortstack and I took a refreshing dip in the pool below the falls. That was really invigorating!

The next two days were really going to be challenging. We started hiking early in hopes of completing the long steep climb out of the valley before the sun got too high in the sky. Since there was going to be no water at the next campsite and we wouldn't be crossing any reliable sources, we had to carry enough in reserve to get us through the night and the short hike out on the final day. We were all carrying at least six additional pounds of weight.

Our progress was further impeded by eight large blowdowns, four of which required a considerable amount of extra effort to overcome. (Oh well, that's why they call it wilderness.) Once at the junction with the District Line Trail we took an extended lunch as we sat on moss covered boulders and rehydrated.

Initially the District Line Trail was wonderful. We found ourselves hiking through dense enclaves of giant Red Spruce trees, moss covered boulders, Rhododendron and luscious ferns. The blowdowns continued and there were a couple of places where the trail disappeared in Mountain Laurel thickets but we fought our way through it all. (Oh well, that's why they call it wilderness.)

Two miles into the trail we ran into a really big problem. Our GPS units said that

we were standing right at the junction with the County Line Trail, where we had to turn left to reach camp and complete our circuit. There was a pile of sticks to the left, the kind the hikers use to warn other hikers not to go that way, but we didn't see anything that remotely looked like a trail or even a place where you could walk.

We probed the forest to the west of the trail we were on (now the County Line Trail) about a quarter mile before and behind us with no luck. It was four o'clock, we were all pretty beat and some of us were about to tap into our water reserves. I made the command decision to make camp for the night on a wooded knoll I had noticed during our scouting and take the fastest route out of the Wilderness to FR 86 the next morning. (Oh well, that's why they call it wilderness.)

We all ate light the next morning and broke camp by 8:00. We were able to follow the County Line Trail north for about 1.5 miles before it too totally disintegrated in an area where juvenile Red Spruce were making thickets too thick to walk through. (Oh well, that's why they call it wilderness.) After getting stabbed in the leg by broken branches several times, I decided to follow the path of least resistance while still keeping the river and forest road in front of us. (This was one time where our GPS units were really paying off.)

More bad news, It started raining hard as we found ourselves crossing some dry streams. A quick check of the map and our units told us we were getting too far to the west and in danger of ending up at the top of some sheer cliffs overlooking the road with no immediate way down.

After climbing the steep bank of the last stream we made a hard right (easterly) turn to get us back on top of the narrow, descending ridgeline we were supposed to be following. Once back on top we corrected our course to due north with Treebeard's compass and within a couple of hundred yards found ourselves on a rather obvious County Line Trail.

We turned north onto it and soon switchbacked down

to the forest road. It had taken us four hours to hike 2.5 miles plus the bushwhack. It was still raining hard so with barely a pause, we started hiking back to our vehicles.

Within a mile we encountered a large group of campers huddled under a tarp at one of the many primitive campsites along FR 86. A young gentleman was nice enough to give me a ride back to the trailhead. I recovered Big Red and returned to take the rest of the crew back to their cars. It was still raining when we said good-bye to Doc, so opted for the most part, to drive to the Riverside Grille in Marlinton where we changed and ate a nice warm meal before heading home.

Even though the trip didn't go as planned, I walk away from it feeling that 1) I truly tested my mettle as a hike leader as well as the mettle of the rest of the group and 2) reinforced the necessity to plan well for any outing, but especially outings in wilderness areas where anything can and does happen. One needs to research the trip carefully, carry the right maps and navigational tools and, perhaps most importantly, know in advance what you are going to do in the event that you have to bail out.

I am confident that had we tried to continue to reach the originally planned second night's camp we might still be in the woods today.

And that, my friends, is why they call it the Wilderness.

