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The Highlands Voice

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BLAIR MOUNTAIN BATTLEFIELD PETITION “FRIVOLOUS”

By Cindy Rank

On June 2, 2011, a broad coalition of community, environmental, historic preservation and labor history groups filed a petition to protect from surface coal mining some of the most important remaining historically significant portions of the Blair Mountain Battlefield in Logan County, WV - the site of the largest civil uprising in America after the Civil War. (...as reported in the July issue of the Voice)

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy joined the Friends of Blair Mountain, the Sierra Club, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, and the West Virginia Labor History Association in filing the petition.

The petition proposed to exclude from mining a well defined sliver of mountain ridge some 10 miles long where Union miners marching to aid Mingo county miners met a wall of resistance from armed company and federal troops bent on preventing their passage. The bloody uprising is a historically significant piece of West Virginia and labor history and the site of the conflict is being impacted by an ever growing mass of mountain top and other large strip mining in the area.

The 206 page petition documented reasons why the Blair Mountain Battlefield should be deemed unsuitable for surface coal mining by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) due to its historical significance, natural beauty and the important archaeological sites located there.



Blair Mountain Fighters

On July 5, 2011 the WVDEP wrote a 3 page letter rejecting the petition as “frivolous”.

‘FRIVOLOUS’ ?

One must ask which is more ‘frivolous’?

- A thorough, well researched and organized 30 page petition - complete with another 160+ pages of maps, bibliographies and documentation, including the successful nomination that led to the 2009 listing of Blair Mountain Battlefield on the National Register of Historic Places, specific mine permit maps showing threatened sections of the Battlefield and much much more.

- Or WVDEP’s 3 page denial letter based on the questionable application of the law as explained in four main points which I

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Farmer Brown's World Almanac

Lester Brown has a couple of ideas about how we should get and spend our money. Don't look for them in any deal to resolve the current budget standoff, but just possibly, in disguise (masking words such as "tax" and "global warming"), they could show up in time to help pull us back from environmental and economic collapse.

Since 1975, Brown's Worldwatch Institute has published an annual State of the World report. Its model, the Doomsday Clock on the cover of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, had since 1947 focused on the danger of nuclear war. Brown redefined the global emergency. In his view, the fear of armed aggression distracted us from more imminent threats: climate change, population growth, water shortages, poverty, rising food prices, and failing states.

He has restated this message many times in books that have been translated into forty-some languages. Don Gasper gave me Plan B a few years ago. The latest version, World on the Edge, came out this year, with new examples and familiar prescriptions.

2010's examples of "business as usual" included unprecedented heat, fires, and a shrunken wheat crop in Russia, disastrous floods in Pakistan, and another record-breaking ice melt in Greenland. "Business as usual," he writes, has been exceeding earth's regenerative capacity for more than thirty years. His chapter headings are like hammer blows: Falling Water Tables and Shrinking Harvests; Eroding Soils and Expanding Deserts; Rising Temperatures, Melting Ice, and Food Security. And that's just Part I. Part II goes into the consequences. Here Food Security becomes Food Scarcity.

Betraying food insecurity, countries that can afford it, from Saudi Arabia to South Korea, are buying other countries' land to produce the grain they need at home. These deals are often secret. In Madagascar, news of South Korea's purchase of rights to 3 million acres (half the size of Belgium) brought on a coup and cancellation of the agreement.

World on the Edge was finished before the Arab Spring. In the next book, no doubt, the author will point out that those revolutions had as much or more to do with food as with political rights. Who would be able to afford the wheat that was being planted as the people were gathering in Tahrir Square?

Brown began his career as a farmer, raising tomatoes in New Jersey, and food is his first focus. He has said that farming is "the ideal interdisciplinary profession" involving soils, weather, plant pathology, entomology, management, and politics. For him, it became an international profession. After graduating from Rutgers, he spent six months in rural India, and although he returned to the tomato business he had started as a teenager, it no longer seemed exciting. He followed his interest in food, poverty, and population to Washington, where he worked on international issues in the Kennedy Administration's Department of Agriculture. Since then he has founded or helped to establish the Overseas Development Council, Worldwatch Institute, and most recently Earth Policy Institute.

These days, he's often described as a prophet of global warming, but that's too limited. More than thirty years ago, he was decrying "our manhandling of nature... by overfishing the oceans, stripping the forests, turning land into desert." Choking the atmosphere was added to the list.

He notes that farmers can make more money now by selling their water rights than by raising crops. Irrigation accounts for 70% of world water use. Overpumping from aquifers can produce a temporary "food bubble," but it's unsustainable. The same thing can happen as glaciers melt and rivers rise and farmers who depend on surface water have more to draw. Then it's gone.

Further driving up the price of grain is its use to produce fuel.

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MORE ABOUT BLAIR MOUNTAIN (Continued from p. 1)

relate as follows [admittedly restated in my own somewhat biased interpretation].

1) Oh well, we've already granted mining permits for close to 30 % of the 1,668 acres in your petition area, so we'll not even consider the other 70% ... Go away Don't bother us.

2) In 1991 the agency denied as frivolous an earlier attempt (submitted and revised three times) to declare as unsuitable an even larger area in and around Blair Mountain so we're not granting this one either. Furthermore we're ignoring the more recent data and archeological research and documentation gathered in the past two decades and presented in your petition.

3) By the way we denied the earlier petition(s) as being frivolous because it included too much acreage (12,000) - including areas not even in the battlefield, and had too little definition of the specific Battlefield area. This time around you're including far too little acreage... and you're not including all the battlefield sites in your 1,668 acres so we've decided the petition is also frivolous.

4) And besides, timbering and gas drilling have and may again take place in the area you define, so what good is saying there can be no mining? ...Of course we know that federal and state Surface mine law only addresses mining, but hey.....

[????????????????????]

It would be inaccurate to say WVDEP doesn't have the legal authority to deny a petition of unsuitability for mining or to base that denial on the assessment that the information in the petition is flimsy or inaccurate and therefore just plain 'frivolous'.

However, in this instance one can't help but be stunned by the flippant dismissal of the well researched factual evidence presented and the carefully defined petition area based on archeological findings along the 10 miles of very narrow steep ridge line where the most intense battle activity occurred.

WHAT NOW?

Concerned petitioners continue to add to the wealth of archeological information and historical detail collected and documented in this lands unsuitable petition and the already convincing body of factual evidence that led the January 2009 listing of Blair Mountain Battlefield on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Battlefield is still eligible for listing, but due to a very

suspicious 'miscalculation' of the number of landowner 'objectors' to the listing and questionable validity of those objections (- e.g. one person was reported to have been dead for over 25 years), the Park Service removed Blair Mountain from the National Register a year later.

The same groups that submitted the Lands Unsuitable Petition are currently in court appealing the Park Service action that removed Blair Mountain from the National Register.

As the court action proceeds and we evaluate our options for responding to the WVDEP's denial of the lands unsuitable petition, mining in the Spruce River valley continues to encroach upon the last remaining important battlefield sites and this important piece of West Virginia and labor history has become an endangered species.

...Perhaps not surprising from an agency that is willing to allow mining that results in the obliteration of generations old communities, the eradication of major portions of unique hardwood forests, and the pollution of thousands of miles of irreplaceable headwater streams And turns a blind eye to the pollution of the air and water forever damaging the health and wellbeing of those who remain.

But WVDEP's frivolous action is an insult to West Virginia ... and to the fundamental intent of the Lands Unsuitable portion of the 1977 Surface Mine Act.

SAVE THAT DATE!!!

Mark your calendar now for West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Fall Review. Saturday and Sunday, October 29 and 30. Hawk's Nest State Park. Fayette County, West Virginia. Hawks circling right outside your window (avian cooperation not guaranteed), close to Mystery Hole, New River Gorge, etc. etc. etc. Watch for program details in next month's *Voice* and on our website. For more information or to register call Marilyn Shoenfeld at 304-866-3484 .

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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.

WHIRLWIND OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

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

The West Virginia Legislature's Interim sessions went "full blown" as committees met July 11 – 13, with action ramping up on two big issues: redistricting and regulating Marcellus Shale drilling.

It was a busy week that began with a four-hour rally on the Capitol steps on Monday, July 11, sponsored by West Virginians for a Moratorium on Marcellus (WV4MOM), a relatively new group from Morgantown. However, people from all over attended and the crowd was estimated at more than a hundred.

It was one of those blistering hot and humid days. But with the help of lots of water and entertainment from local musicians, the crowd persevered (except for me – I wilted). There were outstanding speakers, including our friend and noted West Virginia author Denise Giardina, Delegates Barbara Fleischauer and Mike Manypenny, and Frank Young speaking on behalf of the West Virginia Environmental Council (See story on p. 13)

The new Select Committee on Marcellus Shale met for the first time in public on Tuesday, July 12. They heard a presentation from Morgantown city councilman and former mayor Bill Byrne on the Morgantown ordinance banning hydraulic fracturing within one mile of the city limits; a presentation on horizontal drilling & hydraulic fracturing technology from a couple of WVU professors (who basically told the committee members not to worry, the new

process is safe); and a presentation on the projected impact on state and local tax revenues from Mark Muchow, WV Deputy Tax Commissioner.

On Wednesday, July 13, Dave McMahon and I gave presentations to the committee on behalf of the WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization and WVEC.

Then on Tuesday, in the middle of all this, acting governor Earl Ray Tomblin held a press conference to announce that he was issuing an executive order authorizing Department of Environmental Protection Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman to file emergency rules as a first step in establishing more regulation of the Marcellus drilling industry.

The executive order outlines some of the emergency rules, but Huffman said the agency is still working on them and that he expected them to be filed in 30 days (from July 11). An indication that the proposed rules changes likely don't go very far was that Tomblin was flanked at the podium by a large assortment of industry leaders.

The following week the House members of the Select Committee announced that they would hold three public hearings in the northern area of West Virginia to hear citizen concerns about what should be in a regulatory bill. The hearings were held July 21 in Wheeling, July 25 in Morgantown, and July 27 in Clarksburg.

A total of more than a thousand citizens turned out for the three hearings.

The hearings went pretty much as expected: landowners and citizens concerned about environmental impacts of Marcellus drilling expressed their views, and industry lobbyists and workers touting "jobs, jobs, jobs."

Wrapping up July interim actions, legislative auditors reported to a July Interim committee that they were unable to track \$23 million in permit and fee revenues from DEP's Office of Water and Waste management due to a seriously flawed computer system; the system is so flawed that it can't mesh with the state's main accounting system, provide historical data or even print out reports.

DEP Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman told lawmakers, "I can tell you how many gas wells we have today that are active and current." "What I can't tell you . . . is how many we had four years ago, for example, or last year."

Pretty amazing!

So what's up next for regulating Marcellus gas drilling?

The Select Committee has scheduled two-hour meetings for each day of August Interim meetings, August 1 – 3. They plan to begin considering amendments to SB 424, the Marcellus bill that passed the Senate but not the House. If the Select Committee can agree to a bill, Tomblin has said he will call a Special Session. That could occur now as early as the September Interim sessions.

This is all making for a very long, hot summer.

WV LANDFILLS TAKING DRILLING CUTTINGS

Drilling cuttings are the bits and pieces of "rock" that are removed from the well bore during drilling for gas. The specific contents can vary depending on the formation that the drilling goes through. For Marcellus drilling, the cuttings contain heavy metals, minerals salts, volatile organic compounds (VOCS) such as petroleum, and naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORM). There are also some chemicals used in the drilling mud.

For many years the disposal method for drilling cuttings has been to put them in a pit, settle the solids from the liquid (drilling brine) which is sprayed on the land, and bury the pit on site. Until recently there wasn't even a requirement for the pit to be lined, and the gas industry fought against it.

One of the new regulations that citizens and environmental groups want to see for Marcellus shale drilling is a requirement for removal of the drilling brine and cuttings to hazardous waste facilities. At least we thought they should qualify as hazardous

waste, since they can contain arsenic, benzene, lead, and other nasties, not to mention the NORM. Unfortunately, the EPA regulations specifically exclude "Drilling fluids, produced waters, and other wastes associated with the exploration, development, or production of crude oil, natural gas or geothermal energy" from the definition of hazardous waste.

There are five Class A landfills currently able to take the drilling waste. They are Meadowfill, Northwestern, Short Creek, Greenbrier and one in Fairmont. All they need to do is apply to the DEP for a "special waste permit." There has to be a leachate analysis twice a month as part of a landfill's NPDES permit, but it is not clear if they are testing for radioactivity, which could vary with each load.

The Greenbrier landfill was first fined for taking the cuttings

(More on p. 6)

Fire in the hole! Does your well water burn?

STUDY EXAMINES CONNECTION BETWEEN BURNING WELL WATER AND MARCELLUS SHALE DRILLING

By Jason Davis

A new study by scientists at Duke University shows that shale gas-extraction in northeastern Pennsylvania and upstate New York is associated with methane contamination in nearby water wells.

The study, published in the May 9, 2011, edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, found that 68 groundwater wells sampled within a kilometer of an active drilling site contained an average level of methane 17 times higher than other wells. The samples were collected at sites as far west as Bradford, PA and as far east as Ostego, NY, focusing on aquifers overlying the Utica and Marcellus shale formations.

The findings may be of particular interest to West Virginia residents that receive well water from aquifers near active drilling sites, since the Marcellus shale extends under the Appalachian Mountains throughout most of the state. Some residents have reported methane levels high enough to ignite tap water as it emerges from faucets.

Unlike conventional natural gas drilling, shale-gas extraction often requires directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing techniques. Marcellus shale is found in long, horizontal strips deep underground. Natural gas within the shale can only be released if the layer of rock surrounding it is cracked open. This is accomplished by first drilling a conventional vertical well until it approaches the layer of shale.

Then, the direction of the drilling is altered in order to extend into the shale formation. According to a video from the American Petroleum Institute, explosive charges are then fired to fracture the rock along the horizontal portion of the well path. This is followed by hydraulic fracturing, commonly referred to as "fracking," in which fluid consisting of water and other chemicals is pumped into the well, splitting open the newly-formed cracks and forcing out the trapped gas.

The study looked almost exclusively at natural gas wells where both directional drilling and hydraulic fracturing were used, with the exception of a single well in New York that was conventionally drilled. Funded by the Duke Center on Global Change and the Nicolas School of the Environment, the resulting research paper was authored by Stephen G. Osborn, Avenor Vengosh, Nathaniel R. Warner, and Robert B. Jackson.

The methane levels in the sampled water averaged 19.2 milligrams of gas per liter, with the highest sample checking in at 64 milligrams. The U.S. Department of the Interior defines a methane level higher than 10 milligrams per liter to be hazardous.

Some drilling advocates have claimed that methane found in well water is biogenic, created by microorganisms that break down organic matter. Such methane is found in landfills and the intestines of animals, including humans. However, using carbon and hydrogen isotope tracers, the research team found the methane in the samples was thermogenic, indicating it originated from deep underground.

So how is the gas making it into the well water? The study considers two possibilities. The first is that the hydraulic fracturing process creates fissures that connect to existing underground pathways that eventually lead to water aquifers, providing a route other than the well through which the gas can escape. However, the authors note that the chances of this occurring are remote, citing the enormous underground pressure against which the gas would have to fight through on its way to the surface.

The second and more likely explanation is that gas is escaping through the vertical portion of the well, closer to the surface where the water aquifers are located. The authors cite two other studies which have documented this phenomenon, known as gas migration. Another study, a 2009 draft report by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, documents dozens of gas migrations from new, active, abandoned and storage wells, with some instances leading to explosions and fatalities.

Another concern about the practice of hydraulic fracturing is the high concentration of dissolved solids and toxic chemicals in the fracturing fluid, which could have dire effects if mixed into residential water supplies. The Duke researchers examined the well water samples for evidence of these chemicals and found none, but urge that further research be conducted in this area.

At a federal level, the regulation of hydraulic fracturing is very limited. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently conducting a large-scale study of shale-gas extraction, with preliminary data expected to be available in 2012. States such as New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia have largely dealt with issues arising from the uptick in shale-gas extraction on their own.

For landowners and residents that rely on well water near active drilling sites, reports such as the one from Duke University add to an already high level of concern. Unfortunately for these residents, the relationship between the oil industry, government, and public is becoming increasingly complex. What actions will be taken, if any, remains yet to be seen.



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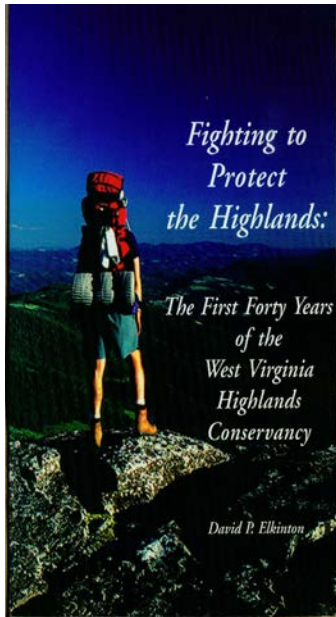
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Book Premium With Membership

As a premium to new members, we are offering a copy of *Fighting to Protect the Highlands, the First 40 Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy* by Dave Elkinton. It is 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.

The book is free to new members as a premium for joining. 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.

LANDFILLS TAKING DRILLING WASTE

(Continued from p. 4)

without a permit, but then they got permits for the "Disposal of Special Waste" and the "Disposal of Petroleum-Contaminated Materials" and they can take 7400 tons of this waste per year.

The Meadowfill waste facility is seeking a Certificate of Necessity from the WV Public Service Commission with a waiver to the Public Notice to build a new cell dedicated for Marcellus drilling waste, which they have already been accepting and mixing with with the regular solid waste.

A developer is proposing to build and operate a 150 acre industrial landfill to receive drilling waste about 1 mile south of Bruceton Mills, in the Little Sandy and Big Sandy watersheds of Preston County, which has generated a lot of local opposition. The Big Sandy sub-watershed was the first local area successfully restored from the impacts of abandoned mine drainage (AMD) pollution. A collaboration of partners, agencies, and individuals logged many hours and contributed millions of dollars to bring the Sandy back.

There will be more and more of this waste as the Marcellus "play" ramps up, and they will be looking for places to put it.

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.



HUGH KEEPS GOING (Continued from p. 2)

We have seen a huge investment in ethanol distilleries. Here it's corn; in Brazil it's sugar. As farmers must compete with (or give in to) cities for water, now people must compete with cars for grain. Another distortion of land use comes from the financial pressure to grow soybeans. Soy meal added to livestock feed boosts the efficiency of converting grain to animal protein. As with gasoline and coal, the market has failed to account for the broader costs of a commodity. Thus, Farmer Brown has become a champion of a diet that is "lower on the food chain."

My repetition of "food" might be misleading. Brown does not shy from its shadow-word, "hunger." He writes of the "demographic trap" in which "large families beget poverty, and poverty begets large families." Poverty, population growth, and a deteriorating environment break down fragile societies. Failing states such as Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, become dangerous not only to themselves but to their neighbors and beyond. They spread conflict, terror, drugs, disease, and debt. Over the years Brown has been writing, the situation has worsened exponentially.

Yet he still thinks we can arrest it.

Brown calls "business as usual" Plan A. His Plan B has four components: First, cut global carbon emissions 80% by 2020. That would be sufficient to stop the rise in atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, save the Greenland ice sheet, and at least the larger glaciers in the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau; then we could begin reducing the concentration to 350 ppm, which most scientists consider to be a sustainable level. Second, stabilize world population at a maximum of 8 billion by 2040. Third, eradicate poverty. And fourth, restore the earth's natural support systems: forests, soils, aquifers, and fisheries.

None can be accomplished piecemeal. Everything has to be done at once. How much would it cost? Less than you might think, says Brown—less than we're spending right now on destructive activities.

The two social goals, poverty and population, which he subdivides into education, health care, family planning, and food support, would cost an additional \$75 billion per year above current expenditures. The earth restoration goal would cost \$110 billion. He compares the total \$185 billion with our military budget: it is only 28% of what the United States spends each year (\$661 billion), 12% of what the entire world spends (\$1,522 billion).

Brown gets his figures (apart from the U.S. defense budget) from the United Nations, the World Bank, and similar sources, and multiplies. You could call them back of the napkin estimates; he would challenge you to find better ones. More important than the

numbers is the insight that our definition of security is obsolete. If we understood the real threats, we'd be more than willing to divert 28%, 33%, or 50% of our military budget to achieve a more secure world. Even better if we persuade the other big military spenders (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom) to join us.

The climate change component is another matter. Although its effects are intertwined with all the other stresses on our planet, its reversal will take both more and less than money. It will require a restructuring of our economy. Here is Brown's second major suggestion for the budget: shift taxation from work to environmentally destructive activities. Basically, "this means putting a tax on carbon to reflect the full cost of burning fossil fuels and offsetting it with a reduction in the tax on income." He would also shift the subsidies we currently grant to coal, oil, and gas over to alternative energy sources.

These ideas are familiar in part because Brown has been pushing them for so long. An optimist in spite of himself, he is cheered by changes such as the de facto moratorium on new coal-burning power plants in the U.S. He might be said to have predicted the decision by American Electric Power, on July 14, to shelve a carbon capture-and-sequester project. According to Climate Wire, it "sent shock waves through the energy industry about prospects for controlling greenhouse gas emissions from coal plants around the globe. . . Coal plants emit about a third of U.S. carbon dioxide, and the technology of curbing their emissions has never been proved at scale." Brown had written that the technology would not be economically viable by 2020, if ever. But the "clean coal" mirage was a distraction. Nowhere is the need to restructure the economy more pressing than in West Virginia.

If you haven't read Brown, World on the Edge is a good place to start. He's a Jeremiah with hope. We won't quibble with his generalizations about clean energy (I'm thinking of wind power) because he's a big-picture man, and he's essentially correct. It's a bonus that he pays so much attention to energy *efficiency*.

By the way, the Doomsday Clock, that for sixty years represented the threat of nuclear war, now also reflects the impacts of global climate change. It stands at six minutes to midnight.

DON GASPER GETS AN AWARD

By Donald S. Garvin, Jr.

On Tuesday, July 19, West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection Cabinet Secretary Randy Huffman recognized the environmental stewardship efforts of West Virginia Highlands Conservancy board member Don Gasper at the 11th annual Environmental Awards Ceremony conducted at the State Capitol.

Mr. Gasper was one of 19 award recipients Tuesday. The DEP's Environmental Awards recognize the accomplishments of state industries, municipalities, educators and community leaders who strive to protect the environment, work to be good corporate neighbors, and educate the state's citizens.

Mr. Gasper received the Environmental Stewardship award in recognition of his lifetime of dedication to the environment.

According to the DEP press release, Mr. Gasper, who is from Buckhannon, is a retired Department of Natural Resources fisheries biologist and "a long-time steward of the environment and a proponent of conservation education on the community, state and national level."

Those of us at West Virginia Highlands Conservancy know that the DEP press release is a huge understatement.

A native of Kansas City, Missouri, Don Gasper moved to Elkins in the 1950's after graduating with a fisheries biology degree from the University of Missouri. He immediately began his career as a fisheries biologist with the WV Division of Natural Resources. For a long while he was the only fisheries biologist covering the streams in the Monongahela National Forest. During his career he became the leading expert on acid rain impacts in West Virginia, and a leading opponent of bad timbering practices in the state. He has also worked on these issues on the national level.

His advocacy efforts have included work with Trout Unlimited, the WV Highlands Conservancy and the West Virginia Environmental Council. He has worked for years with workshops for teachers on environmental education. And his efforts in the local community on solid waste, litter control, and conservation education are well known.

So congratulations, Don Gasper! There is no one more worthy of this recognition.

I, for one, am honored to call Don Gasper my friend.

West Virginia Mountain Odyssey



Outings, Education and Beyond 🇺🇸

August 6-8, 2011, Dolly Sods Backpack/Rohrbaugh Plains to Bear Rocks, Monongahela National Forest, WV: 18 mile moderate shuttle featuring vistas, waterfalls, streams, forest, open plains and bogs. Short first and third days. Pre-registration required. Contact Mike Juskelis @ 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

September 3-5, 2011, Reddish Knob Backpack, George Washington National Forest, VA: 20 mile Circuit featuring views from one of the highest peaks in VA at the halfway point. Daily mileage: 3/12/5 (Subject to change.). Pre-registration required. Contact Mike Juskelis @ 410-439-4964 or mjuskelis@cablespeed.com.

September 11, 2011, Dolly Sods, meet at Red Creek Campground, Introduction to the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory bird banding station. Pre-register with Cindy Ellis cdellis@wildblue.net

September 25, 2011, Monroe County, meet at trail parking lot, Introduction to Hanging Rock Migration Observatory annual fall hawk watch. Pre-register with Cindy Ellis cdellis@wildblue.net

October 29-November 1, 2011, Coopers Rock State Forest Car Camp, WV: Two hikes: Scotts Run Loop and a hike through a virgin Hemlock Forest, both about 8 miles. Campsite reservation and pre-registration required. Contact Mike Juskelis @ 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

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.



WHERE ARE THE BUMPER STICKERS?

In the time we have offered bumper stickers, we have distributed thousands. Where are they now?

This month we had reports (courtesy of Julian Martin) of sightings in Acadia National Park, Maine, San Francisco, Berkeley and Oakland, California. If you have spotted one in a far away place or an unusual location, send it to the editor, Highlands Voice.. The address is in the roster on page 2.

FISH AND CLEARCUTTING ON THE MONONGAHELA

By Don Gasper

The current Land and Resource Management Plan for the Monongahela National Forest came out in September, 2006. Even at the time it came out I was dissatisfied about some of the provisions in the Plan. I have even spoken privately with some about challenging the plan and found them encouraging.

One of the problems with the plan is that brook trout streams receive no more protection than any other stream. They are not even adequately identified. A second problem is that there is hardly any emphasis on flooding. There may also be other problems (response to Acid Rain, a major Trout Unlimited concern).

Brook trout reach sediment fines were found to be at levels where reproduction would become reduced. As the canopy closes over small brook trout streams they become cooler. Brook trout can then occupy larger and lower summer water as the warmer water minnow competition/predation is reduced. When this happens brook trout are less susceptible to drought and predation by mink, raccoons, etc. The over-winter survival and after winter reset are more favorable.

Watershed disturbance (roads, logging, and development) causes higher peak flows. This results in more channel scour and the sediment generation that results. Ideally, the Plan would eliminate clearcutting. If clearcutting is not eliminated, the Plan needs a clear statement that the emphasis on clearcutting throughout the Plan will be limited to streams where brook trout are absent. In those areas, any timbering would use helicopter selective cutting instead.

Any stream channel recovery must be a top-down hydrological process in now destabilized channels. Recovery is perhaps occurring, barely noted over the last fifty years in a few places. With the right stewardship set forth in a better plan, however, recovery and reduced flooding would be more obvious to many citizens and landowners over the next twenty years.

A top-down recovery will benefit brook trout populations first. In fact they are recovering ahead of their channel reaches because of streamside shade; but below gravel and rubble choked channels cause channel bank scour and even "tree-topple". Thus the channel is undermined from within. Here the water is warmed enough to favor

the warmer water fish population, that with warmer temperatures itself, begins to limit brook trout habitation.

These recovering brook trout populations will respond readily to any channel recovery. The occupation of lower reaches will increase their connectivity. Brook trout populations will no longer be as isolated as they have been in the past. They have the potential--with active intelligent fish management in watersheds that are little disturbed and themselves recovering--to become a famous Monongahela brook trout fishery, a fishery that is no longer threatened. This is a real opportunity.

Clear cutting is hydrologic ally harmful. The science we particularly use is from the U.S. Forest Service research station at Parsons, West Virginia, within the Monongahela. There it gets 58 inches of rain and snow; 24 inches runs off and 27 inches is evapotranspired by the forest canopy. Immediately after clearcutting, stream channels must carry the 24 inches that normally runs off plus the 27 inches that, absent clearcutting, would have been retained by the trees until it evapotranspired. This total of 51 inches is twice as much flow as the channels have carried in the last 100 years! This causes channel scour and sediment. This prevents a top-down recovery of stream channels first through brook trout reaches and eventually producing flooding below.

The Monongahela National Forest contains over 80% of West Virginia's trout streams. It is a partner in Trout Unlimited "Bring Back the Brookie" program. The brook trout is their "indicator species" of watershed health.

In spite of this, the current Land and Resource Management Plan for the Monongahela National Forest uses clear cutting as its "preferred method" of timber harvest.

While the emphasis on clear cutting was a mistake in the current Plan, there is hope. The United States Forest Service has made a new forest planning rule. The new rule states that restoration is to be the driving principal in Forest policy. With restoration as its driving principal, it may be possible to rethink this emphasis on clearcutting and correct that mistake.

STILL IN NEED OF SOMETHING TO READ

The Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Bookstore will host author Steve Keating in a signing of this new book, *A Dolly Sods North - Blackwater Companion: A Guide To Hiking Through The History, Geology And Ecology Of The Region*.

This 400 page guide contains sections on local history, community ecology, plant species and has detailed trail descriptions and maps. It is published by McClain Press and is available at the Canaan Valley NWR Bookstore.

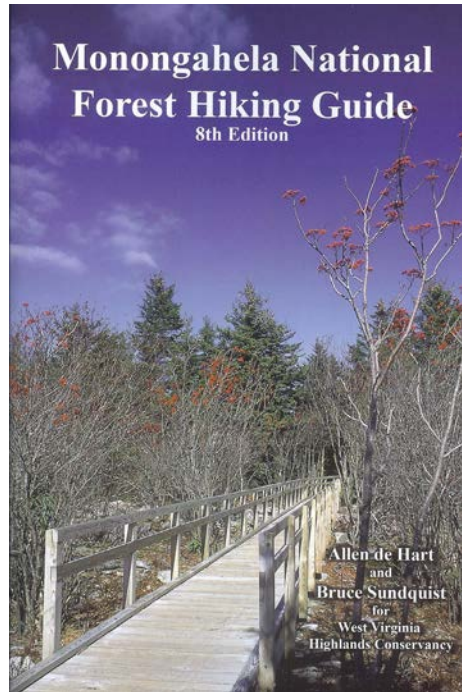
The author will be present on Saturday, August 27th at 7:00 pm for a discussion and book-signing.

The Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge is located on Rt. 32, 8 miles south of Davis, WVA.

SUSTAINABILITY FAIR COMING UP

Kanawha Valley Connections will hold its 3rd annual Kanawha Valley Sustainability Fair on Saturday, September 24, 2011. This year's event will be held from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Columbia Gas Transmission Building, 1700 MacCorkle Avenue SE in Charleston.

The Fair will introduce participants to and educate them about economic, environmental and social sustainability. Fair goers will experience sustainability through a variety of themes, including locally grown food, conservation, renewable energy, green building, green jobs, government and community resources, recycling, health and wellness, economic development, culture and history. The event will feature food, interactive and hands-on exhibits, activities for children, performances and practical ideas for residents and businesses. We are expecting vendors with a variety of goods to sell. Over 2,000 participants attended last year's Fair and associated events, taking advantage of activities, products and services offered by more than 100 exhibitors and off-site sponsors.



The Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide

By Allen de Hart and Bruce Sundquist

Describes 180 U.S. Forest Service trails (847 miles total) in one of the best (and most popular) areas for hiking, back-packing and ski-touring in this part of the country (1436 sq. miles of national forest in West Virginia=s highlands). 6x9" soft cover, 368 pages, 86 pages of maps, 57 photos, full-color cover, Ed.8 (2006)

Send \$14.95 plus \$3.00 shipping to:
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
 P.O. Box 306
 Charleston, WV 25321
 OR
 Order from our website at
www.wvhighlands.org

New 8TH Edition Now Available on CD

WV Highlands Conservancy proudly offers an Electronic (CD) version of its famous Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide (8th Edition), with many added features.

This new CD edition includes the text pages as they appear in the printed version by Allen deHart and Bruce Sundquist in an interactive pdf format. It also includes the following mapping features, developed by WVHC volunteer Jim Solley, and not available anywhere else:

- All pages and maps in the new Interactive CD version of the Mon hiking guide can easily be printed and carried along with you on your hike
- All new, full color topographic maps have been created and are included on this CD. They include all points referenced in the text.
- Special Features not found in the printed version of the Hiking Guide: Interactive pdf format allows you to click on a map reference in the text, and that map centered on that reference comes up.
- Trail mileages between waypoints have been added to the maps.
- ALL NEW Printable, full color, 24K scale topographic maps of many of the popular hiking areas, including Cranberry, Dolly Sods, Otter Creek and many more

Price: \$20.00 from the same address.

HATS FOR SALE

We have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy baseball style caps for sale as well as I ❤️ Mountains caps.

The WVHC cap is beige with green woven into the twill and the pre-curved visor is light green. The front of the cap has West Virginia Highlands Conservancy logo and the words West Virginia Highlands Conservancy on the front and I (heart) Mountains on the back. It is soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure.

The I ❤️ Mountains cap comes in stone, black and red.. The front of the cap has I ❤️ MOUNTAINS. The heart is red. The red and black hats are soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure. The stone has a stiff front crown with a velcro strap on the back. All hats have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy printed on the back. Cost is \$15 by mail. West Virginia residents add 6% tax. Make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to James Solley, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306

T- SHIRTS

White, heavy cotton T-shirts with the *I ❤️ Mountains* slogan on the front. The lettering is blue and the heart is red. "West Virginia Highlands Conservancy" in smaller blue letters is included below the slogan. Short sleeve in sizes: S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Long sleeve in sizes S, M, L, and XL. **Short sleeve** model is \$12 total by mail; **long sleeve** is \$15. West Virginia residents add 6% sales tax. Send sizes wanted and check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy ATTEN: James Solley, WVHC, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306.



BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

By John McFerrin

On July 23, The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Board met at the Currey River Center, the headquarters of the Coal River Group. We were welcomed by Bill Currey who talked about the activities of Coal River Group—organizing trash pickups from the river, advocating for public sewage treatment, working to develop tourism and recreation on the coal river.

President Hugh Rogers appointed Frank Young, Cindy Rank, and Cindy Ellis as a nominating committee. They will be seeking nominees for seats on the Board of Directors. Anyone who wishes to suggest a nominee (including themselves) may contact one of them.

We discussed the fall review. After considering various possibilities, we settled on Hawks Nest State Park the weekend of Halloween. At the time of the meeting we had not verified that Hawks Nest would be available that weekend so that plan was contingent upon its availability.

Treasurer Bob Marshall reported on our financial situation. While never rolling in dough, we are doing well enough and even a little better than we expected.

Administrative assistant Beth Little reported on membership. We are doing pretty well although more active outreach could improve things. She also presented the possibility of our being assigned an Americorps worker. They are being placed now and, if we presented a project, we could probably get one. We would have to pay something for the worker and provide a supervisor.

The big question is whether we could develop a project quickly enough for this round of placements. Hugh appointed a committee of Bob Marshall, Beth Little, and Frank Young to consider the possibilities.

In public lands, Don Gasper made a presentation about the use of fish toxicants as an aid to trout. The idea is to catch and remove small trout, use rotenone to kill the fish that remain in the stream, and then return the trout. Freed of competition, the trout could then thrive. This only works above a barrier which would prevent the competing species from returning. (For a longer explanation, see the October, 2010, issue of *The Highlands Voice*, available on line or in your stack of stuff you intend to read someday) Don thinks that this would be a beneficial practice in Monongahela National Forest trout streams and wants us to endorse it. The National Council of Trout Unlimited endorses this practice, in some instances; WV chapters of TU are still discussing the issue. Although the Forest Service

may be (or may not be) considering this informally, there is no active proposal to use it.

The Board had concerns about intentionally introducing a poison of any kind into the environment. It was reluctant to take the lead in supporting a practice that apparently was the source of some controversy.

Mr. Gasper also made a presentation about the deleterious effects of clearcutting on stream health. (See related story on p. 9 of this issue). He wanted us to take action to ban it in the national forest. It was the sense of the Board that we opposed clearcutting. Because there was no specific plan of how to attack the practice that was before it, the Board took no immediate action.

Also in public lands, Larry Thomas made a Power Point presentation (provided by Judy Rodd who was unable to attend)

on a proposal for an Allegheny Highlands National Park and preserve. As proposed, it would take approximately the northern half of the Monongahela National Forest and part of the George Washington National Forest and make a national park. Under the proposal, selected areas of the park/preserve such as Canaan Valley, Seneca Rocks, etc. would be managed as parkland. The balance would be managed as a nature preserve, continuing such current uses as hunting.

The Board did not have nearly enough information to take any sort of action either supporting or opposing this proposal. We hope to arrange for a presentation from the Forest Service, the Park Service, or both on how the management would be different if it became a park.

In mining, Cindy Rank brought us up to date on the multitude of actions and activities that we are involved in. Beth Little discussed the possibility of drilling for gas from the Marcellus shale formation in the Monongahela National Forest. Right now there is exploration going on around Richwood. While the exploration itself is irritating to people (lots of trucks, helicopters, surveys, small blasting, etc.) there are no permit applications yet.

In wind, Larry Thomas brought us up to date on several proposed projects.

We also had a report of matters legislative. See story on p.

For lunch we had an assortment of kebabs plus mixed greens salad catered by Practically Delish and arranged by Cindy Ellis. For dessert we had ice cream and hand (Cindy's hands) picked blackberries.



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.

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.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY ISSUES FINAL GUIDANCE

By Cindy Rank

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its Final Water Quality guidance for surface coal mines in Appalachia on July 21, 2011.

The Guidance was first issued in draft form April 1, 2010 “to clarify EPA’s roles and expectations, in coordinating with Federal and State partners, to assure more consistent, effective, and timely review of Appalachian surface coal mining operations with respect to provisions of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) [Section 404 fill permits and Section 402 NPDES water discharge permits], the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Environmental Justice Executive Order (E.O. 12898).”

Regional offices of EPA have been directed to begin consulting the guidance immediately. Unless otherwise noted, the discussion of the provisions of the Clean Water Act, NEPA, and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice and Human Health in this guidance focuses on their applicability to Appalachian surface coal mining operations in Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.

EPA provided several comprehensive peer-reviewed scientific reports that revealed information on how mountaintop removal and other large scale strip mining harms the integrity of important headwater streams and natural resources in Appalachia. It received some 60,000 comments on the draft guidance.

So now more than a year later the Final Guidance is out ... but so is the jury.

Industry is curiously somewhat reserved, although the National Mining Association’s legal attack on this guidance continues. (As reported in earlier editions of *the Highlands Voice*, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and our allies have intervened in defense of EPA’s ability to enforce the Clean Water Act.)

Citizen and environmental groups are divided. Does the Guidance take us anywhere, or is it just another bunch of words....?

Everyone had hoped for more, but what first appeared as a road to some sharply pointed directives has morphed into a field of wandering paths and informative roadside signs. The substance of the Guidance and reliance on the supporting science are still present but signs of any stick wielding have given way to the carrot once again.

I for one am still pleased that the agency didn’t totally cave under the unrelenting political pressures.. But for many of our friends spirits have been dampened and patience is growing thinner.

It’s still unclear just how much improvement will be felt on the ground and how much freedom EPA will have to implement the

guidance.

And so, while protestors have taken to the trees once again in Raleigh County in an effort to thwart continued destruction at the Bee Tree mine site on Coal River Mountain on the ridge above the Brushy Fork Sludge impoundment, the games in Congress continue – not only with regard to the national debt and the tug of war between cutting spending and increasing revenue.

Possibly the group most united in its assessment of this latest EPA action is our own West Virginia Congressional Delegation.

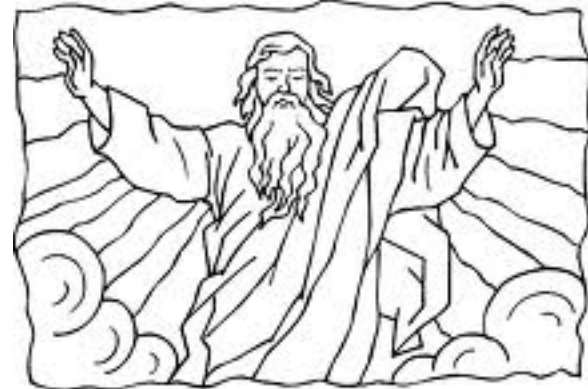
As research and peer reviewed documentation of negative human and environmental health impacts from and near mountaintop removal mine sites mount, our folks in Congress fiddle, but it’s not the late Senator Byrd’s tunes of adapting to change that are being played.

Comments similar to this one by Representative Nick Rahall that appeared in *Greenwire* [thanks to Ken Ward of the *Charleston Gazette* for pointing it out] are not uncommon:

“With this guidance document, EPA has not only appointed itself judge, jury and executioner, but has also deemed itself Almighty God. While EPA goes to great pains to state this guidance is not legally binding, we are all too aware that it will use it as a club to subdue all parties involved in the permitting process to its will.”

Would that Lisa Jackson really owned such a club.

For more about the process and the final Guidance documents see: <http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/guidance/wetlands/mining.cfm> .



EPA?

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

ANOTHER ATMOSPHERE OF LAWLESSNESS

By Frank Young

This rally here today is about horizontal drilling and hydro-fracturing (fracking) for natural gas- especially what is called “shale gas”. And in our region that shale is known as Marcellus Shale. Horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing thousands of feet out from the vertical well bore hole has mushroomed into a new and largely lawless enterprise. The atmosphere of lawlessness surrounding Marcellus drilling and fracking, with tens and hundreds of millions of gallons of water, is approaching the “atmosphere of lawlessness” we see every day in the coal industry.

Yes, when West Virginians think of lawlessness in industry we usually think of the coal industry, and especially the coal strip mining industry. Who said that strip mining for coal takes place in an atmosphere of lawlessness? A United States Federal District Court said so, back in 1999. The lawlessness of the coal industry comes about partially because of inadequate laws to protect the environment. But that lawlessness is more about the state issuing strip mining permits contrary to state and federal laws- and lax enforcement once permits are issued. And so because of political corruption at the highest levels, coal strip mine permitting and mining continues to be conducted in an “atmosphere of lawlessness”.

But conducting gas and oil drilling and related development activities in an atmosphere of lawlessness happens for reasons other than corruption of existing laws. These operations are conducted in an atmosphere of lawlessness simply because the technology has out-paced the law. The gas industry laws developed 20 and 50 and 100 years ago did not contemplate the gigantic machinery and the numbers of such machinery we see on narrow roads in the hills and hollows of West Virginia today.

Those laws, developed so many decades ago, did not contemplate that today’s gas industry would demand tens and hundreds of millions of gallons of water for hydro-fracking, and that a now horrendous problem of how to dispose of all that poisoned water would threaten our groundwater and public water systems today- such as in Monongalia and Wetzell counties in West Virginia- and in dozens of counties and towns in surrounding states.

In the early and mid 1990s, West Virginia was threatened by an avalanche of train loads of garbage from New York and New Jersey and all over the east coast. The disposal of solid waste was then about to be conducted in an atmosphere of anarchy and lawlessness because there were almost no laws regulating solid waste.

But because of citizen demands, the state legislature stepped up to the plate and did the right thing. It passed a comprehensive set of rules and regulations to govern the management of solid waste. And the West Virginia legislature gave West Virginia counties LOCAL CONTROL over the siting of landfills and other solid waste facilities. This was able to happen because the interstate garbage industry did not already have a stranglehold of corruption on state government officials in West Virginia such as the coal industry has.

It is past time for the WV legislature to do the right thing again. The legislature needs to promulgate strong and effective legislation of rules and regulations for the development of Marcellus shale gas- and provide a funding source for sufficient numbers of drilling and well inspectors to carry out enforcement of those rules and regulations.

Less than a year ago the Director of the WV DEP told several dozen of us that there was enough gas well drilling activity going on in Wetzell County alone to keep all of his currently 15 well inspectors busy. And that is only one of 55 counties in WV. And let me tell

you, when a state agency admits that it is overwhelmed by so much industrial activity that its available inspectors and enforcement agents can’t keep up with the activity in even one of our 55 counties, then we have a tremendous problem on our hands.

The lobbyists for the WV Environmental Council are busy educating our legislators on what is needed to effectively regulate the shale gas development industry. And we are receiving support from many legislators all over the state. But unless you, as did what we called the “garbage crazies” in the 1990s, demand of your legislators that they support strong and effective rules and regulations- AND including more LOCAL CONTROL at county and community levels, then it will not happen. So send letters and e-mails and phone calls to your legislators.

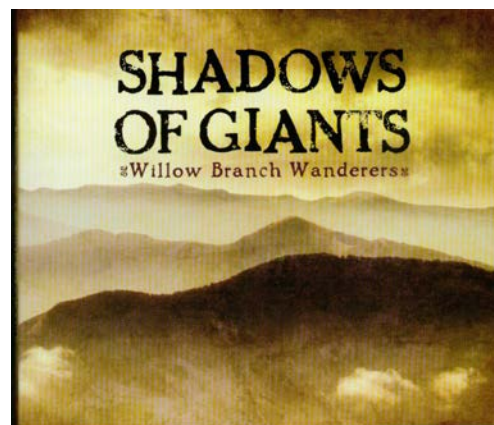
Next year- which is an election year- these same politicians will be asking for your votes. Don’t let that be a one-way street. To **get your votes** your public servants need to **earn your votes!** So tell ‘em today and again tomorrow and the next day, and next week, and next month, what you want. Demand that the law catch up with the drilling technology so that gas well drilling and development will not continue to be conducted in an atmosphere of lawlessness and anarchy because of inadequate regulation of the industry, or insufficient numbers of enforcement inspectors.

West Virginia has nearly 4000 State Police, county Deputy Sheriffs, and city police officers doing primarily highway patrols. That’s about one policeman for every five hundred (500) citizens in the state. But West Virginia has only 15 oil and gas inspectors to oversee more than 65,000 oil and gas wells in West Virginia. That is 4,333 wells for each inspector. Isn’t something wrong with this picture?

Note: This article is adapted from a commentary Mr. Young delivered at the WV4MOM (WV for Moratorium on Marcellus) rally held at the state capital on July 11, 2011.

CHECK IT OUT

The Willow Branch Wanderers, a band based in Richmond, Kentucky, has released a new album, *Shadows of Giants*. It is a collection of mostly original works with a few covers of old songs. Its themes are social justice, especially as that term would apply to the mountains of eastern Kentucky. The “Giants” of the title are the mountains that once were there but now are gone. To sample it, go to www.willowbranchwanderers.com.



GRAYSON HIGHLANDS/MOUNT ROGERS CAR CAMPING

By Michael Juskelis

Every year for the past three years we've been coming here over Janet's birthday weekend (Prime time for the Catawba Rhododendron bloom) and conducting forays into the Mount Rogers N.R.A. and Grayson Highlands SP. Initially we explored the quintessential aspects of the area: Pine Mountain, Wilburn Ridge, the wild ponies, rock formations and the Mount Rogers Summit itself (highest point in the Old Dominion). Last year we toured Iron Mountain using both the new and old AT as backbones for the loops and developed three new circuits. This year we returned to more or less fill in the gaps; probing the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness, a miniature Grayson Highlands, and adding a missing link to our previous Iron Mountain adventures.

The hike started from the beginning of the main campground loop. We descended on the Wilson Trail and soon turned right on Upchurch Road, an equestrian trail. This in turn switchbacked deep into the Wilson Creek drainage. An un-official spur trail soon connected us to Big Wilson Creek Trail which led us into the heart of the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness area.

The trail followed the creek for a while as it passed through Rhododendron tunnels and Hemlock trees and eventually crossed the creek. The trail continued to follow the stream a little longer before turning away from it and climbing to its junction with the Kabel Trail. There were some other unsigned old roads that intersected the main trail earlier, but Mr. Garmin helped us to decide which was the correct course to follow.

While the Big Wilson Trail had been considerably chewed up by horses this one was nearly pristine with a good hard surface and moss growing along the edges. After a brief climb the trail flattened out and followed nearly the same contour line to its end at the First Peak Trail.

I should mention something here, a fact that even my hiking mates noticed and deserves an explanation. Once upon a time the entire Grayson Highlands/Mt. Rogers N.R.A. was one big open pasture land. Little Wilson Creek Wilderness was no different. There were very few trees to be found on the hillsides because of the constantly grazing livestock.

When the area became part of a national forest and state park two separate herds of wild ponies were introduced to maintain the open balds we see today in the most popular areas. Well, apparently Little Wilson Creek didn't get its herd of ponies. The result is an odd kind of forest, mostly

hardwood with some pine and spruce at higher elevations and Hemlocks and Rhodos in the hollows. That in itself describes a typical Appalachian forest. What is odd is the grass understory of the dense forest we observed in several places, clear evidence that, at one time, this area was also open pasture land.

The First Peak Trail traverses four knobs. As expected the first is named First Peak. It was fully engulfed in forest, as expected. Treading on a large flat rock in the trail surrounded by short scrubby trees served as the only proof that you were crossing it.

This peak naming format continued for the next two peaks. Unlike their big brother, however, these were miniature open balds with thickets of Flaming Azaleas instead of



Catawba Rhodos. Views of the region began to develop more and more as we hiked with a significantly different perspective of the area than one gets on one of the more popular hikes and we had it to ourselves. Things seemed "turned around" because we were approaching them from a different direction. The Third Peak is outside of the Wilderness and part of the park.

The trail continued westward crossing one more bald, this one much broader and offering even better views. Until this moment it has been un-named but in keeping with the cartographer's apt identification of high points in this area I bequeath upon it the name ... you guessed it ... Fourth Peak. From here we descended on a very rough horse trail with its own unique view to the Scales (An area where cattle was weighed before taking that long one way ride to the city) where we took a little break.

From here we jumped onto the familiar Appalachian Trail, which ascended Stone Mountain at an oblique angle. We passed through fields of Fire Weed as we reached the open crest and all of its amazing views.

After a mile or so the A.T. descended back into the wilderness and its forest. As the trail continued to descend we caught one final mountain view that appears in many of the photos of the area. It is the Twin Pinnacles near the Visitor Center. These are a short walk from it and probably the two best view points in southern Virginia.

We soon found ourselves on the Seed

Orchard and then Wilson Roads with all of their Rhododendrons and moss covered rocks providing a cooling sensation as we sauntered, each at his/her own pace back to camp.

I have read some pretty disappointed critiques of the Little Wilson Wilderness Area. All I can say is that the author(s) must not have explored the area in depth or used the right combination of trails. It has a wonderful combination of scenery and solitude not often found in the more popular areas of the highlands.

I knew the next day's hike was going to be anti-climatic compared to what we had experienced the previous day but it would be nice just the same. It began by climbing up to the Flat Top area of Hurricane Mountain via the Flat Top Trail and a gravel service road.

From there we turned east onto the yellow blazed Iron Mountain Trail (previously the A.T.) The forest was thick and mature with outstanding canopy. The going was slow in places as horses had done a number on eroded sections and the recent rain had worsened the situation.

Trail conditions improved greatly as we crossed the highpoint of the mountain and drainage improved. We had completed most of the elevation gain by the time we reached the Iron Mountain Trail. Now we were going to descend on the Appalachian Trail, a horseless trail. When hiking in this area, if you want to visit some of the less traveled areas you have to be willing to share the trail with others even if they tend to be destructive. I'm OK with that ... most of the time. Still it's nice when through the course of the day a hiker can take a few steps and not have to worry about where he is putting his feet.

After topping a little rise the trail sidehilled in and out of coves as it gradually descended to Fairwood Valley. The trail was well graded and sloped, helping the hiker keep undue pressure off of his ankles and knee ligaments.

We stopped for a long refreshing pause where the trail crosses Fox Creek on a bridge. Precious was very happy to see the deep cool pool under it. After drenching our heads with cold water we began a very slight climb on the Fairwood Valley Horse trail. Initially this was pretty muddy in spots but after crossing the creek at its confluence with Lewis Fork it became packed gravel. We were surrounded by Rhododendron until we passed through a pasture with views of Hurricane Mountain, which we had just hiked, and Pine Mountain, home of Mount Rogers. We were back at our cars by one. Total distance about 7 miles.

ALLEGHENY TRAIL-SOUTH BACKPACK

By Michael Juskelis

The boots hit the ground right at 1:00 as planned. The hike began by crossing Rt 92 and walking through a couple of meadows full of wildflowers including some deep red lilies. After crossing nearly dry Anthony Creek, the trail seemed to disappear at the fringe of a very overgrown meadow. Single Malt found the continuation of the trail on the far right side.

The 1,000 foot climb seemed more gradual than shown on the elevation profile. Window sized views of Middle and Beaver Lick Mountains were had as we neared the top.

Once on the ridge the trail merged with the Meadow Creek Mountain Trail, an old grassy jeep road lined with fields of chest high Black Cohosh. I'd like to say that the rest of the day's hike was flat but in reality it had a series of horizontal undulations that would eventually take its toll on all of us by the end of the day.

I should note here that there is not one established campsite along this 29 mile stretch of trail except for the shelter area at Smith Knob. This is not to say there are no places to camp. In several places the understory is relatively thin and the ground flat and free enough of rocks that finding a place to throw down a tent or two should not be difficult. We found such a place and bedded down for the night.

We got an early start the next morning knowing that we had to tack on an additional mile to an already long and difficult day. The old jeep road continued to the southern tip of the mountain where we took a long break as we looked through the gap between Meadow Creek and Little Allegheny Mountains. From there we descended along a series of sidehill switchbacks to a refreshing pool on Meadow Creek along side of CO Rt 14. The water was clear and cold. We filled up our water containers, splashed around in it and took a long break before continuing.

We crossed the road and picked up the continuation of the trail. Initially it was an old grade cutting through a hardwood forest but it soon plunged us into some of my favorite kind of hiking: Rhododendron Tunnels and Hemlock trees. At first it was a foot path, but after crossing Laurel Run on a standard USFS bridge, soon joined a wide, grassy woods road. We again had some minor problems navigating through some overgrown grassy areas and we missed one turn where a sign had fallen down.

My GPS unit immediately picked up the mistake. We retraced our steps and found the sign, propping it up with rocks, and continued on the correct path, an extremely sharp, uphill turn easy to walk by in either direction. There were a few perplexing sections as we climbed out of the hollow as the tread totally disappeared. There were blazes but no obvious signs of a trail.

Fortunately we were able to spot them and spent a minimum

amount of time floundering around. We passed a sign marking the Eastern Continental Divide (Water on the eastern slope flows to the Atlantic Ocean while water on the western slope flows to the Gulf of Mexico) and a memorial plaque to the Perry family. (They allowed the ALT to pass through their property, thereby connecting the Monongahela National Forest with the George Washington Forest).

We made it to the Smith Knob Shelter and called it a day, having hiked 13 miles and climbing 1900 feet. We were all exhausted, but Single and I were so much so we decided to sleep in the shelter and not set up our tents. This would be my first, and probably last, experience in a shelter. Although I slept OK the mosquitoes kept pulling me off of my mattress even though I had hosed down with Deet. The critters figured out how to get under my clothes and bite me where I have never been bitten before.

The best part about this area is the wonderful view to be had from a farmer's open field directly in front of the shelter. It was a real "Sound of Music" moment with mountain ridges stretching from the left to the right and all the way to the horizon. I was expecting to see Julie Andrews and the Von Trapp family come running up the hill. I walked out there the next morning to catch an inspirational sunrise and I did. At this moment the photo is my computer's desktop.

Except for a couple of overgrown areas the day's hike was pretty nice, even though the undulations continued to be an annoyance. We were all nearly out of water as we completed the first steep climb of the day. We took a long break before descending into Westvaco (a regional paper company) land to replenish with sparkling, cold water from the confluence of two streams.

We had made good time up to this point (There was really no other choice) but lingered here as long as we could. We had one more long climb to go. Fortunately this was mostly on old woods roads. We took another break at the top where there was a sign announcing that the trailhead was a mere 3 miles ahead (2.6 according to the official trail notes).

On our descent we caught a few more window views of the surrounding mountains. Here the trail was mostly a nice footpath as it gradually descended along the spine of a ridge. A couple of Mountain Laurel and Blueberry thickets proved to be minor annoyances. In season – flowers in the spring and berries later in the summer - would be a joy to behold. For now they served to irritate the mosquito bites and Nettle stings acquired earlier in the trip. Once at the bottom, the trail skirted the backyards of some homes and threw in a couple more of those undulations as if to say "Goodbye!" to us before depositing us at our vehicles.

Happy Fourth of July!!!

A view from Smith Knob Shelter on the Allegheny Trail. Photo by Mike Juskelis.



BALSAM FIR RESTORATION—ALWAYS MOVING AHEAD

West Virginia's balsam fir trees are very predictable and reliable in producing cones every five years. It was in 1991, 20 years ago, when we first collected. In 1996, when we last collected cones from these trees, they were the southern-most balsam fir trees on the continent. We collect the cones, extract the seeds, and grow seedlings for our red spruce ecosystem restoration efforts, which balsam fir is a component of. Beyond ecosystem restoration, our balsam fir conservation efforts have two additional

purposes; 1.) the species is in decline from an exotic insect pest called the balsam woolly adelgid, and 2.) over-population of white tailed deer have hampered natural regeneration from over-browsing.

On July 23 & 24, we held a volunteer cone picking event that was very productive. We were able to collect several bushels of cones which will hopefully allow us plenty of seed to grow restoration seedlings as well as bank some seed for the future. This fall, in October and November, we will begin the

important work of collecting red spruce cones, which is a little easier because we don't need to climb the trees as we do with the balsam fir. Rather, we collect them from the ground where they end up after the red squirrels cut the cones. On September 17, we will also have our annual Fall tree planting event on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. See the Mountain Odyssey schedule of outings for more information if you'd like to get involved and help out.



Bob Churby climbs the ladder to reach the cones which are found in the very tops of mature balsam fir trees. We had four 40 ft. ladders and two 32 ft ladders in operation for our volunteer event.

Randy Kesling helps out by hauling some sacks of balsam fir cones from the fir stands to the road. The Wildlife Refuge Boardwalk made the job a little easier by allowing the use of a wheel barrow. Randy and his wife Carla are long-time volunteers who have helped lead outings, plant trees, restore trout streams, lobby congress and otherwise been involved in many of the Highlands Conservancy's conservation efforts over the years. Randy is active with the Mountaineer Chapter of Trout Unlimited and is a Master Naturalist



The stand of balsam fir trees at Freeland Run on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge had a good crop of cones this year which allowed us to gather some much-needed seed for our restoration projects.