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# The Highlands Voice

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## LAST CHANCE TO COMMENT ON MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL EIS

The deadline to comment on the draft Environmental Impact Statement is January 6, 2004. If you want to comment, now is the time.

Several individuals and organizations have made statements about the draft. In a May 29, 2003, press release, the National Mining Association said, "The Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released today by federal and state agencies that have spent the last four years studying surface (mountaintop) mining operations in Appalachia, provides a constructive roadmap for coal mining operations as well as state and federal regulatory agencies that could lead to further environmental improvements at mining operations," National Mining Association (NMA) President & CEO Jack Gerard said today based on NMA's very preliminary review of the summary documents provided with the full report."

Bill Raney, president of the West Virginia Coal Association, praised the government study as a "tremendous effort" that he said "validates the solid practices of eastern mining over the years. What we've been doing in West Virginia is right."

Other commenters have not been so enthusiastic. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service observed that the draft EIS "cannot be interpreted as ensuring any improved environmental protection." The Wildlife Service went on to say, "The EIS technical studies carried out by the agencies—at considerable taxpayer

expense—have documented adverse impacts to aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, yet the proposed alternatives presented offer no substantive means of addressing these impacts. The alternatives and actions, as currently written, belie four years of work and the accumulated evidence of environmental harm, and would substitute permit process tinkering for meaningful and measurable change."

In commentary which appeared in the October issue of *The Highlands Voice*, John McFerrin compared the three alternatives for action proposed by the draft EIS to discussing who gets to rearrange the deck furniture while the ship is headed straight for the iceberg. That commentary went so far as to bemoan the sorry state of the entire Environmental Impact Statement process, a process which has slipped from its original purpose of encouraging sound decision making into a tool that the government must manipulate before it can go ahead with what it wanted to do anyway.

The Sierra Club supports "scientific studies that document the widespread and irreversible damage the coal industry is doing to Appalachia. Yet this EIS rejects—without meaningful consideration—specific restrictions on the use of valley fills. These restrictions could be based on size of the fill, cumulative impacts, types of streams affected, or



A real alternative.

(Continued on p. 5)

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From the Western Slope of the Mountains

## Conserving Credibility

by Frank Young

The WV Highlands Conservancy seeks to "preserve and protect" areas of particular importance in West Virginia, according to our organizational by-laws. And over its 36 year history the Highlands Conservancy has developed considerable credibility in its weighed approach to how to best protect the natural resources of West Virginia.

Credibility is a kind of capital. In some respects, it is like money in the bank. But in a word, credibility is "respect". Like money, it was earned in the course of doing the work we do. Having earned it, we could have squandered it recklessly; or we could have carefully saved every morsel, knowing we'd need it for that sure to come battle where our credibility, or respect, would be an importantly asset to bring to the table. We are perhaps now, again, about to bring our credibility to bear in working to preserve and protect special natural resources.

After actively or passively supporting two wind "farm" proposals (Backbone Mountain and NedPower), and remaining neutral on two others (U.S. Wind Force and Mega Energy), the Highlands Conservancy is poised to resist a proposed 65 turbine wind farm on Rich Mountain, near Spruce Knob, Sinks of Gandy, Seneca Creek Backcountry, Canaan Valley, three Wilderness Areas and many unique, little changed by time "country roads" areas and sparsely settled communities like Harmon, Job, Whitmer and Horton.

Over the past three years we have painfully weighed and debated our support or opposition of or our neutrality on the various Potomac Highlands area wind farm proposals. Following the advice of a long time Conservancy supporter, the late Richard DiPretoro, I have steadfastly insisted that, above all else, we must maintain the credibility and the integrity of the Conservancy's good name in our postures. That means that we weigh our words carefully on these controversial wind energy projects, that we have good, sound reasons for any interventions we undertake, and that we not carelessly let ourselves be seen as "aginers" without good reasons presented for our actions.

I think we have successfully maintained our integrity and credibility on wind energy development in West Virginia- when we could have easily squandered them away to the point of public and official contempt for our positions. But the evidence, in WV Public Service Commission documents and in anecdotal messages, is that we have indeed increased our credibility with both the general public, with our members, and with permitting agency personnel on wind energy matters.

Now that the Conservancy's Board of Directors has officially opposed the proposed Rich Mountain wind project, and the project's developer indicates that development of project details is close at hand, the Conservancy brings to the table added credibility to bear on details of the project, and even on actual permitting considerations.

We can be proud that we have not allowed the debates among ourselves to discredit our overall effectiveness as an advocate for preservation and protection of some most uniquely special places in the Rich Mountain area. We could not have recklessly called "Wolf!" five times and expected to have our voices still carry the same sense of alarm. Now, as the wolf comes calling to Rich Mountain, and elsewhere, people will hear our alarm.

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# BIRDS AND BATS AT BACKBONE MOUNTAIN WIND FARM

By Peter Shoenfeld

On November 17, the National Wind Coordinating Committee (NWCC) sponsored a two-day meeting on these subjects, in the offices of RESOLVE in Washington's West End. The first day focused on the question "How is Biological Significance Determined When Assessing Possible Impacts of On-shore Wind Power Facilities?". The second day was a meeting on the NWCC Wildlife Working Group. A number of wind energy companies, government regulatory agencies, consulting groups, and environmental organizations were represented.

I attended the second day's meeting only, largely to hear presentations related to bird/bat mortality at the Mountaineer Backbone Mountain sight, where the Highlands Conservancy participates in study oversight. Dr. Paul Kerlinger, who is study director this year's Mountaineer avian mortality study, presented "FAA Lighting of Wind Turbines and Bird Collisions." Jim Lindsay, who has environmental responsibility for FPL Energy, the Mountaineer operating company, presented "FPL West Virginia Site Survey Results."

Dr. Kerlinger's principal conclusion was that the red flashing FAA lights used on wind turbines do not seem to attract night migrating birds, although the obstruction lighting used on communications towers does attract these same birds, as do the bright lights sometimes used on buildings. This was based on the absence of major mortality events at FAA-lighted turbines, and the lack of correlation between presence of these lights and such mortality as has occurred, in studies to date, including the one at Mountaineer. Possibly causative differences between the turbines and the communications towers include lower height and the absence of guy wires. In discussion, it was suggested that existing data should be re-examined for correlation between mortality-at-turbines and proximity-to-lights. This would address the possibility that the birds are in fact attracted by the FAA lights, but

are as likely to get killed by other turbines on their way to the lights, as by the lighted turbines themselves.

Dr. Kerlinger also presented some bottom-line conclusions regarding bird mortality at Mountaineer. He concluded that about 180 birds were killed this year (about 4 birds per turbine), disregarding the May



**Pippistrelle**

*Photo by Ernest Walker*

event where 27 birds were killed in fog near the bright sodium vapor lighting substation lighting, which has since been turned off. This conclusion was based on an extrapolation using the number of dead birds actually found (65) and an adjustment to reflect measurements of searcher efficiency (birds found/birds present) and scavenging rate (reciprocal mean time before killed birds are scavenged). I criticized the precision of Kerlinger's result (4 dead birds/turbine/year) on statistical grounds. Because of the small sample used in the efficiency study, and the low efficiency actually measured, there can be little confidence that this number was not in fact much higher or lower.

Mr. Lindsay described the Mountaineer project and its history of environmental risk assessment and monitoring. He then

announced and described the recent bat kill (see last months Voice). He said that there had been previously documented, similar impacts at Buffalo Ridge, MN and Steline, WA, and that all of these may have been due to a tendency for migrating bats to turn off or ignore their biological echolocation equipment. He said that FPL was surprised by the severity of this event, but now intends research to (a) determine the biological significance on local populations, (b) determine how bat behavior is involved, and (c) to develop mitigation techniques. Since then he has circulated an initial white paper, commissioned by FPL.

Maryland wind farm critic Dan Boone took exception to some aspects of Lindsay's presentation. He suggested that FPL should have foreseen this event, and that Kerlinger's recent dead bird search efficiency and scavenging study should have included bats. He also indicated to me that he considered the Highlands Conservancy in some way culpable.

A detailed final report on Dr. Kerlinger's study is expected in December. The Technical Review Committee, in which the Highlands Conservancy participates, will have a review in finalizing this report and in planning next year's studies.

Other second day talks included a future development forecast by Tom Gray of AWEA, an analysis of collision risk and mitigation strategies at Altamont Pass by Shawn Smallwood, a survey of collision risk by Wally Erickson of West, Inc. Rob Manes of the Wildlife Management Institute presented a powerful argument that wind farm development would lead to species endangerment through habitat fragmentation in mid-west grasslands areas, particularly for both Lesser and Greater Prairie Chickens. He also opined that similar effects might be found for forest species.

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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.*

## THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT: BACKGROUND

By John McFerrin

The draft Environmental Impact Statement is the result of litigation previously filed by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and several citizens of southern West Virginia. In late 1998 the plaintiffs in that case agreed not to pursue some of their allegations. In exchange, the various agencies agreed to conduct a comprehensive study of the environmental effects of mountaintop removal strip mining and valley fills.

In mountaintop removal strip mining, the tops of mountains are blasted away to expose the coal seams beneath them. The resulting rock and dirt is then disposed of in adjacent valleys. Since the adjacent valleys almost always contain streams, the result is that streams are filled with rock and dirt.

The draft study makes no recommendations and presents no alternatives that would restrict the practice or limit it. While earlier drafts had contained alternatives that would have restricted fill construction, this draft does not.

The draft study's recommendations are largely for better coordination among agencies in streamlining of the process of evaluating applications for permits authorizing mountaintop removal strip mining and valley fills. It says, "Cross-program actions include rulemaking; improved data collection, sharing and analysis; development of a joint application, harmonized public participation procedures, Best Management Practices and Advance Identification of Disposal Sites evaluations; and close interagency coordination. These actions would serve to further minimize the adverse effects on aquatic and terrestrial resources and protect the public."

The agencies who would be coordinating their efforts presided over the practices which resulted in the environmental damage described in the Draft. The Draft offers no explanation on how the same agencies doing the same thing would "minimize the adverse effects on aquatic and terrestrial resources and protect the public."

The draft does recommend that the agencies continue efforts to eliminate three barriers to mountaintop removal and valley fills. The first of these barriers is the prohibition upon mining within one hundred feet of a stream, often called the "buffer zone rule." Under current law, mining within one hundred feet of a stream is prohibited. If mining within one hundred feet of a stream is prohibited, then one would assume that filling that stream with dirt and

rock would also be prohibited. The federal Office of Surface Mining is currently pursuing a rule change that would eliminate this buffer zone rule so as to allow the filling of streams. The draft study recommends that these efforts continue.

The second of these barriers is status of the rock and dirt that is used to fill valleys and streams under the federal Clean Water Act. The discharge of waste material into the waters of the United States is prohibited by that Act. If the Act is interpreted in such a way as to include the rock, dirt, etc. (formerly the mountain top) as waste, then it could not be disposed of in streams. The draft study recommends that the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continue in their efforts to define "fill" in such a way that disposal of this rock and dirt would be allowed.

The third of these barriers is the system of nationwide general permits currently used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps issues general permits for categories of activities which, while they are regulated under the Clean Water Act, cause minimal environmental damage. It also issues site specific permits for activities which have the potential to have a greater impact. These site specific permits require much more careful environmental review than does the nationwide general permit.

Historically, the Corps had approved valley fills under a nationwide permit. When mountaintop removal strip mining became more controversial in recent years, the Corps indicated that it would begin doing some site specific evaluations of proposed valley fills and issue site specific permits.

The draft Environmental Impact Statement endorses more extensive use of the nationwide general permit to approve valley fills. They would be approved under a general permit that assumes that they have limited environmental impact.

In summary, the draft Environmental Impact Statement documents the environmental destruction of mountaintop removal strip mining. It makes no recommendations to avoid that destruction. Instead, it recommends that the agencies carry on their currently ineffective regulation in a more coordinated manner. It does recommend that possible legal barriers to the continuation of the practice in its current form be eliminated.

## BOOK NEWS

*Plan B: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble* by Lester R. Brown (Norton, 2003)

Reviewed by Don Gasper

Lester Brown writes (or rides) again to save the world. This wise author, founder of World Watch and publisher of the annual reports on "The State of the World", has another new book entitled predictably, "Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble - Plan B". Just in time too, but do take heed. It is only 285 pages.

What he calls "Plan A" is "Business As Usual". He points out it isn't working, and he tells us exactly why. It is scary the way he heaps the world's woes upon us. No one could doubt but that he is right about our being in big trouble.

Do not despair, he has a Plan B. Quite seriously, this hopeful guidance may now be humanity's best course for a decent standard of living for all. In fairness it must be for all, and it cannot be peaceful otherwise. There are already too many of us for sustainability. From soil and water conservation, to global warming, to international cooperation in this one-world, to a new economics, to new energy sources, he puts it all together. He notes so much depends on education, human goodness, and governmental leadership.

Even if the book, full of facts and

ideas, is hopeful on the whole; there is a clear sense of urgency.

### Last chance to comment on Draft EIS (Continued from p. 1)

value of the aquatic resources in the region." It also opposes, "any changes that would weaken the laws and regulations that protect clean water." This includes particular opposition to elimination of the stream buffer-zone rule that prohibits mining activity within 100 feet of streams. [Alternatives 1 and 3 would eliminate the rule, while Alternative 3 would "clarify" it by saying that it does not apply to valley fills.]

For more information about the Sierra Club's position, see its website, [www.sierraclub.org/sierra/coal/](http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/coal/)

The Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition says, "The report mentions, and then immediately rejects, any proposals that would restrict the ability of the coal industry to bury Appalachian streams under valley fills. These proposals include:

- Restricting valley fills to certain types of streams.
- Restricting the size of allowable valley fills from more than 250 acres to just 35 acres.
- Setting an upper limit on the total

number or percentage of streams allowed to be impacted.

- Labeling the streams in the region as "high value," which would kick-in other parts of the Clean Water Act that could restrict the use of valley fills.
- Using the anti-degradation rules of the Clean Water Act to prohibit the use of valley fills.

"The report dismisses most of these options because it claims there is not enough "science" to support them. It boldly rejects size limits on valley fills because the "economic study results were determined to have limitations and were not suited for establishing alternatives." In truth, the government's economic studies showed that even the strictest size limit would have a minimal economic impact on the economy and jobs."

For more information about what the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition thinks of the draft, go to their web site at [www.ohvec.org/issues/](http://www.ohvec.org/issues/)

[mountaintop\\_removal/articles/EIS\\_scam.pdf](http://mountaintop_removal/articles/EIS_scam.pdf). Should you have difficulty knowing what they really think (soft-spoken and genteel bunch that they are), you may be able to get some guidance from the label OHVEC gave to the portion of its web site which discusses the draft EIS.

Now it is your turn. Both the Sierra Club and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition provide more in depth analysis of the draft on their web sites. These may be helpful in preparing your comments. Neither the West Virginia Coal Association nor the National Mining Association provide any analysis of the draft on its web site. The entire draft as well as the executive summary are available at [www.epa.gov/region3/mntnpt/](http://www.epa.gov/region3/mntnpt/). **You may send your comments to John Forren, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (3EA30), 1650 Arch St., Philadelphia, Pa., 19103 by January 6, 2004.**

## A WINNING COMBINATION: EMILY SAMARGO AND THE NORTH FORK WATERSHED PROJECT

By Judy Rodd

Friends of Blackwater's North Fork Watershed Project, located in the town of Thomas in Tucker County at the head of the Blackwater Canyon, is blessed with the leadership and energy of Emily Samargo, 25, from Morgantown WV. Emily has been managing the North Fork Project, which is dedicated to cleaning up acid mine drainage in the North Fork of the Blackwater River.

Emily began as a Vista Volunteer under the OSM Appalachian Clean Streams Program, and she is now a full-time FOB employee. Under Emily's watch, the North Fork Project has set up an office in the Thomas Education Center, and has employed two Office of Surface mining interns to research mine drainage in the North Fork, and the history of the area's coal and coke industry. Emily will have a new Vista Volunteer assistant in January.

In September, thanks to Emily's hard work, the North Fork Project received the **Watershed Outreach and Education Award** from the WV Department of Environmental Protection. The award was given for creating watershed awareness and changing attitudes. The project also received a \$5,000 grant from the DEP for its watershed work. Emily and her interns have led many school trips to the banks of the North Fork to do water testing, have done

presentations in the Tucker County schools, and have published articles on their work in the *Parsons Advocate*.

The North Fork Watershed Project was recently contacted by the EPA, with a offer of help to do a Targeted Assessment



of the pollution in the North Fork between Coketon and Douglas. We hope this analysis will lead to a water treatment program on the North Fork that will bring it back to life!

In June of 2003, the North Fork Project received a Humanities Foundation mini-grant, which allowed Emily to bring together historians in a workshop on the history of Coketon. This workshop led to more

research being done on the Davis Coal and Coke Company, and what remains of this extensive enterprise — that once employed 10,000 people along the North Fork.

Emily is also researching the famous 1898 civil rights case on discrimination at the "Negro school" in the town of Coketon. Documents found at the Tucker County Courthouse and the West Virginia Supreme Court archives reveal a landmark decision won by West Virginia's first black lawyer, J. R. Clifford, for schoolteacher Carrie Williams. Ms. Williams was denied payment for teaching a full school year. The school board had decided the black children at Coketon only needed 5 months of schooling, while white children were taught for 8 months. Clifford won the case, setting an important precedent in West Virginia and nationally.

Emily has moved this project forward at lightning speed. She has planted herself firmly in the community and has earned the respect of professionals in the agencies dedicated to remediating acid mine drainage. Emily Samargo has put a friendly face on conservation in Tucker County! You go girl!!

Learn more at [www.saveblackwater.org](http://www.saveblackwater.org) and [www.northforkwatershed.org](http://www.northforkwatershed.org)

**Monongahela National Forest Supervisor, Gauley District Ranger Ignore 70 Year Prohibition****MOTORIZED RECREATIONAL VEHICLES IN CRANBERRY BACKCOUNTRY**

By Dave Saville

With the blessings of Forest Supervisor Clyde Thompson, new Gauley District Ranger, Doug Oliver, opened up the Cranberry Backcountry to public motorized use for the first time in history. The one-day openings occurred on consecutive Sundays, Oct. 19 and 26. Other than in the local newspapers, the public was not notified of the opening.

Thousands of people piled into their cars and drove the 16-mile dirt road that parallels the Cranberry River between Cranberry Campground and the Cranberry Glades. Forest service workers counted 470 cars on the first Sunday and 670 on the second. This is the first time that the public has been allowed access to motor through the backcountry in over 70 years of Forest Service ownership.

In his Charleston Daily Mail column, John McCoy quotes Oliver saying "At other places I'd worked, we'd sometimes open gated roads on Sundays to allow local folks to see the sights," he says. "When I came to this district and saw how popular the Backcountry was, I thought it might be a good idea to open the Cranberry road for a day or two." This was done on a test basis and Oliver is considering opening up the backcountry again in the future.

"Our concern is for people who had backpacked in or bicycled in, only to have a procession of cars go parading by," says DNR director Ed Hamrick. "How do you think they felt, having expended the effort to get into a semi-wilderness area by the only means they thought was legal, and then see hundreds of people doing something that's supposed to be against the law?"

Joe Webb, West Virginia Council of Trout Unlimited says, "from a TU standpoint, it's a big concern for us, especially with the Catch & Release areas up there being wide open to poaching, and because it likely put increased pressure on brook & brown trout spawning beds in an area where we're just starting to get a recovering wild (unstocked) trout population.

As an official "backcountry" area on the Mon, the Cranberry enjoys the most protected status that Forest Plan provides. According to the Official Forest Management Plan, Backcountry (management prescription 6.2) areas are to be managed primarily for "A primitive non-motorized setting," and "wildlife habitat for species requiring a low level of disturbance." "A predominantly natural appearing environment where interaction between users is low and there is a high probability of experiencing isolation from the sounds and sights of man where little or no evidence of roads or motorized use exists." The "Desired Future Condition" portion of the Management Plan says, "The area will be managed in such a way as to meet the criteria for semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation," and "the transportation system will be closed to public motorized use."

Under the "Standards and Guidelines" section for backcountry management the Management Plan states; "Management will strive to maximize the areas potential to provide semiprimitive non motorized recreation opportunities;" and "Forest roads will be closed to public motorized use. Infrequent administrative use may occur for outstanding rights, emergencies, access to adjacent opportunity areas, or management of the recreation resource."

The Forest Service's own survey of use and users of the Cranberry Backcountry found that 84% of those surveyed felt that allowing public motorized use of the Cranberry Backcountry would reduce the quality of the backcountry experience. Only 4% thought

it would improve the quality.

For anyone who has had any doubts about whether official Wilderness designation is necessary to protect our backcountry areas, this outrageous action by the Forest Service should lay those doubts to rest. Obviously the Forest service can't be trusted to implement the intent, or letter of the Forest Management Plan. They've somewhere found a loophole large enough to drive over a thousand cars through. Please contact them to let them know what you think "closed to public motorized use" means. Obviously, they need some help deciphering this complicated concept.

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Forest Supervisor  
Monongahela National Forest  
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Cranberry Road In Fall © Jonathan Jessup.com

Road in Cranberry Backcountry Photo © Jonathan Jessup

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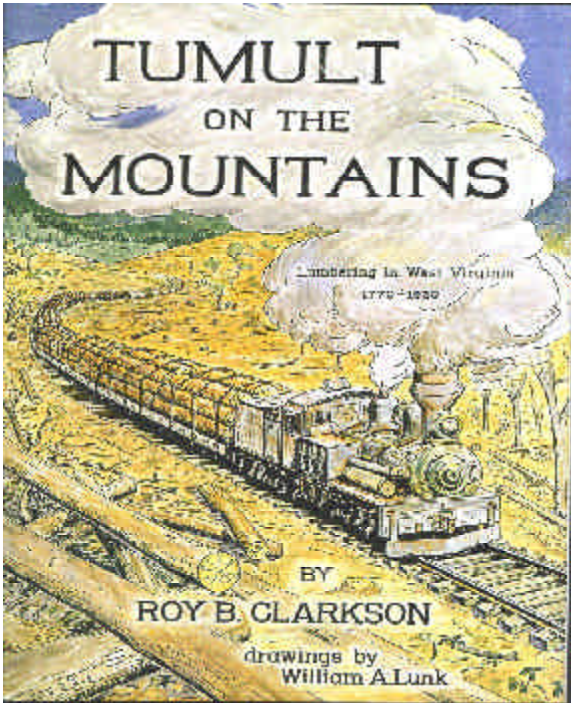
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**Mail to: West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321**



**Tumult on The Mountains** by Roy Clarkson  
McClain Printing Company – Parsons, West Virginia 1964

*"Tumult on the Mountains – Lumbering in West Virginia, 1770-1920"* portrays the lumber industry from its inconspicuous beginnings through a century and a half of progress. As long as the virgin timber supply lasted, the industry grew, slowly at first, then with ever increasing impetus to a crashing climax in 1909. By this time much of the original timber was destroyed and the industry rapidly declined.

Much of the information was obtained from letters and personal interviews with remaining "old-timers" who fondly recalled the old days and shared their experiences with him. 257 full-page pictures are used in the book to depict every phase of the lumber industry. The preservation of these photographs along with the comments of the vanishing "old-timers" is a most valuable contribution to the history of West Virginia.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has a limited number of these books, signed by the Author, Roy Clarkson, below his hand written message; "Keep West Virginia Wild, Wonderful." Roy is a long-time member of the Highlands Conservancy. Proceeds will benefit the campaign to designate more Wilderness on the Monongahela National Forest. This book is a must-read for anyone with even a casual interest in the forests of West Virginia. Thanks to Roy for this generous contribution to our efforts.

We are selling these signed editions of Tumult on the Mountains for \$45. Price includes shipping.

# THE FOREST PRIMEVAL: What It Was Like and Where It Went

By Ronald L. Lewis, Eberly Professor of History, West Virginia University

## *The Wild Primeval Wood*

The struggle to tame the wilderness has been a metaphor for the American experience since the first European settlers set foot on American shores. To the first colonists, the trackless wilderness elicited a foreboding that had deep cultural roots. On the European continent, the millennium-long struggle to domesticate nature had spawned a mythology of the forests as wild lands alien to human habitation. Farmland cleared and open to the sun was the civilized human abode. In addition to this cultural preconditioning, early pioneers saw in the American wilderness a direct threat to their survival. The primeval forests harbored wild animals, hostile natives, and a dark immensity that might swallow up the unaware straggler forever. Success in clearing the land meant the triumph of human control over the wild randomness of nature. Failure was too awful to contemplate, for it meant reverting to an original state of savagery. For the pioneers, the forest was, as the nineteenth-century frontier historian Francis Parkman observed, "an enemy to be overcome by any means, fair or foul."

The Appalachian Mountains marked out the last great kingdom of virgin forest in the eastern United States. In the mid-nineteenth century, the famous writer and illustrator from Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, David Hunter Strother (Porte Crayon), described a hunting trip he had made into the 'impenetrable' Canaan Valley wilderness in 1857. Strother noted that he had "heard stories of men who had spent days" in the Canaan wilderness "wandering in circles and who had finally perished from starvation."

Others were not so much terrified as awestruck by the Canaan wilderness. The Wheeling novelist Rebecca Harding Davis wrote in 1880 that the total silence was as "strange and oppressive as noonday," and that "human voices were an impertinence in the great and wordless meanings of the woods."

Actually, the ancient Appalachian forest was much more forgiving and varied than the popular vision perpetuated by its early descriptions. Like their forebears, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Americans viewed the wilderness of western Virginia as an obstacle to be conquered. As lands east of the Appalachian Mountains were taken up, settlers moved over them and into the hack country. Generally, they came from two directions. People with ties to the more urbanized northeast took up lands in northwestern Virginia along major avenues of transportation: the Monongahela, Ohio, and Kanawha rivers. Settlers from the rural south Atlantic region entered the state through southern mountain passes and established homesteads in the landlocked interior counties. From this original migration pattern grew the north-south sectionalism which would characterize much of the history of West Virginia.

## *Industrial Transformation*

For the first century after settlers planted frontier society in what became West Virginia, change came slowly. Then, between 1880 and 1920, their world underwent a transformation, profound for the scattered farm population who occupied the West Virginia back woods, as industrial capitalism penetrated the vast virgin forest of

the state's interior.

The forest was indeed enormous, for as late as 1880, when timber extraction began in earnest, two thirds of the state was still covered by its ancient growth. It is a measure of how swiftly the transformation to an industrial economy came that West Virginia had been almost completely denuded of virgin forest by the end of the 1920s. The enormity of scale is difficult to comprehend, but timbermen estimate that over thirty billion board-feet of lumber was stripped from the landscape during this period.

As with coal, the state's other major natural resource, development of the timber industry was possible only after railroads were constructed to haul the timber to market. Economic development was not a new concept, nor was it imposed on West Virginians by outsiders. From the state's founding in 1863 well into the twentieth century, West Virginia's public officials actively promoted the extraction of its natural resources as the road to prosperity. Reinforcing the booster spirit among industrial developers was the aspiration of most West Virginians toward a material improvement in their economic condition. The assumption that the state's abundant timber and coal resources would provide the basis for a robust economic development grew into a conviction that seldom was challenged successfully. Nor was there much resistance to its corollary assumption that only the railroad could stimulate this industrial growth. West Virginia's boosters, like their counterparts in other parts of the United States, were captivated by the railroad as the great modernizing agent that would elevate American civilization out of the wilderness.

Two of the major railroad lines that traversed West Virginia on the eve of the great transformation originally were constructed to connect the country's urban East with its agricultural Midwest. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad entered the northern tip of the state and followed the most direct route available to Ohio, completing its line through to Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1852. In 1873, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad completed its trunk line in the southern part of the state, passing through the New and Kanawha river valleys to Huntington. The third major railroad, the Norfolk & Western, penetrated the southern part of the state in 1888 and completed its main line between Norfolk, Virginia, and Huntington, in 1892.

Between the B & O and the C & O lay a vast virgin forest, but neither of the two railroad companies intended to risk investment in development within the state. So there was opportunity for West Virginia capitalists to complete railroads into the state's interior forests. Most notable of these native industrialists were Senators Johnson Newlon Camden, Henry C. Davis, and Stephen B. Elkins. Their fledgling rail systems penetrated the interior counties from the north and laid the foundation for development of the timbered on the western slopes of the Allegheny Mountains. The C & O completed the strategic encirclement of the mountains by constructing its Greenbrier Division northward up the Greenbrier Valley along the state's southeastern border to connect with these railroads reaching into the forest from the north.

(cONTINUED ON P. 9)





**TIMBER FOREST PRIMEVAL**  
(CONTINUED FROM P. 8)

Numerous smaller independent railroads sprouted out from the mainlines. They, and more than six hundred short logging railroads, completed an intricate rail web linking the processing mills along the mainlines with the cutting face deep in the woods. Even excluding the small logging and tram roads, track mileage in the state grew dramatically in 1917 from a few hundred miles to 3,705 miles. Everywhere the railroads went, small towns sprang up. According to James Morton Callahan, a prominent state historian writing in 1913 at the peak of the timber boom, the railroads "carried into the silence of the primeval woods the hum of modern industry," spawning gigantic lumber mills and bustling new towns. His contemporaries likened the industrial transition of the back counties with the Oklahoma land rush.

**A New Era**

Arrival of the railroad signalled a new era in the exploitation of the virgin forest. Timber operators were able to bring in the heavy steam-powered equipment required to cut, transport and process big timber. Now vast segments of the countryside could be deforested. An impressive number of the most technologically advanced hand saw mills were established, and the capacity of these mills was voracious. The Meadow River mill, the largest hardwood lumber mill in the world in its heyday, consumed 3,006 acres of virgin timber a year. In 1909, the peak production year, 83 band mills and 1,441 other lumber mills produced 1.5 board-feet of lumber. The largest known tree to fall was a white oak in Tucker County that measured 13.5 feet in diameter. This lone giant produced enough lumber to fill an entire train.

The railroads carried out lumber and returned with manufactured goods, food, household furnishings, and farm supplies, ordered from catalogs. Once isolated back woods dwellers were now linked to the national marketplace, and this connection exerted a profound influence on the lives of back county West Virginians, just as it had done on others throughout rural America.

**Social Change**

Along with industrial development in the mountains came workers seeking employment and merchants to provide them with services. The population grew exponentially, more than quintupling in Tucker County, for example, from 3,151 in 1880 to 16,791 in 1920. The moun-

tain population became diversified. Workers from the northern states, southern African-Americans, and foreigners joined native mountaineers. Although the percentage of African-Americans and foreign immigrants was small in comparison to that of big cities, their presence was highly visible to the native population in this relatively homogeneous human landscape. As in all boom towns, life in the new mill towns often was wild and raucous.

Many local inhabitants believed that traditional mountain hospitality, civility, and character were the first cultural casualties of the transformation. Farmers complained that their sons were "thrown into intimate association with a rough, drifting, foreign element," and that the farms had fallen into neglect. Gone to seed also was the "hospitality that once prevailed," having given way to "a spirit of selfishness and cool-headed business," lamented A. B. Brooks, the states leading conservationist of the time.

Sound character was only one of a long list of casualties linked to deforestation. Agriculture was altered forever by the industrial transformation. Prior to deforestation, farm crops were grown and livestock raised primarily for home consumption. Farmers used a system of forest fallowing. When the railroads penetrated deep into the mountains, the pattern changed. As the forests were removed, agriculture shifted from subsistence farming to the modern, market-driven commercial system. The number of livestock raised in the mountain counties tripled and quadrupled. The number of farms also increased, but the average farm size became smaller as timber companies pur-

chased huge tracts of land, and farms were subdivided among a growing number of families.

**Environmental Disaster**

The population squeeze was aggravated by the environmental disaster inflicted on the land by deforestation. This disaster was well understood by conservationists even as it evolved, but their alarm was drowned out by the clamor for industrial development. The great forest was mature with a fully developed canopy. and when the tops of the giant trees were cut away, the dry slashing was left on the forest floor to become a virtual tinderbox awaiting the careless spark. With heavy steam equipment in the forest sparks were ever present to ignite the infernos which repeatedly swept the countryside. Fire followed fire until many areas were forever altered from their original state.

The extent of the damage caused by these fires is staggering. In 1908, the number of fires reached 710 and burned an area of more than 1.7 million acres, representing more than one tenth of the entire surface of the state and one fifth of its forested area. Destruction of the deep humus soil that had built up on the forest floor for thousands of years reduced countless acres of land to bare rock in the higher elevations of the interior counties. Spruce Knob, the state's loftiest peak, had its appearance made over in just this fashion.

People who lived downstream from the areas where the forests had been removed were affected seriously by deforestation.



# West Virginia Mountain Odyssey

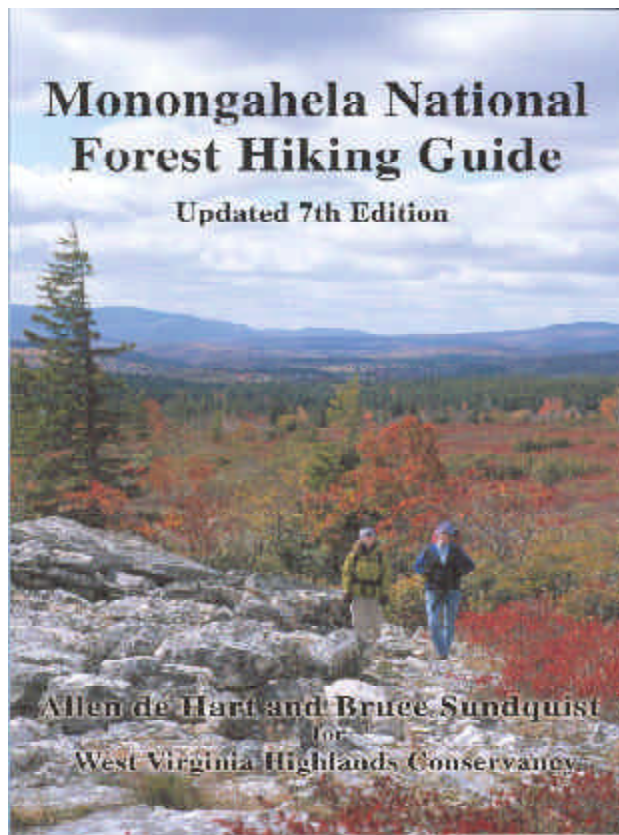


## Outings, Education and Beyond

**January 17, 2004** Dolly Sods Snowshoe Given up hiking for the winter? Snow is no reason to put those hiking poles away. Get those winter boots and parkas out and see Dolly Sods from another perspective. This will be an 8 mile ramble on Cabin Mountain with warm-up hot chocolate afterwards at the Whitegrass X-Country ski center. If no snow is available, we will hike in Dolly Sods. Snowshoe rentals are available at Whitegrass at reasonable rates. Contact Susan Bly 304-876-5177 (day) or 304-258-3319 (7:00 pm - 9:00 pm) sbly@shepherd.edu for further details.

**February 14, 2004** Canaan Mountain Snowshoe Love the great outdoors and want to spend some quality time in it? Then join other like minded individuals as we snowshoe across the top of Canaan Mountain and fall in love with snow all over again. Warm-up hot chocolate afterwards at the Blackwater Falls Lodge. If no snow is available, we will hike on Canaan Mountain. Snowshoe rentals are available at Whitegrass X-Country ski center at reasonable rates. Contact Susan Bly 304-876-5177 (day) or 304-258-3319 (7:00 pm - 9:00 pm) sbly@shepherd.edu for further details.

**Almost Anytime. 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 a lunch— there is a picnic area on Larry's mountain. Just call Larry or Julian Martin. Leaders: Julian Martin, (304)342-8989, imaginemew@aol.com and Larry Gibson, (304) 586-3287 or (304) 549-3287 cellular



### Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide

by Allen deHart & Bruce Sundquist

Published by the  
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(Continued from p. 9)

When the higher elevations were denuded, erosion further disfigured the land. Rain washed away the already thin layer of topsoil, gullies formed in sandy soils, and clay surfaces washed away in sheets, leaching fertility out of the soil. What washed off the hillsides went into the streams, and farmers' organizations publicly complained about the serious pollution of the state's waters. Lower down, the water picked up drainage from tanneries, pulp mills, saw mills, factories, and coal mines, and towns became intolerably polluted.

#### A New Awareness

Governor William M. O. Dawson established the West Virginia Natural Resource Commission in October 1908 to investigate the condition of the state's natural resources. The commission's report was alarming. Cattle had died from drinking the waters of the Cheat River, once synonymous with purity. Nearby Decker's Creek contained no living organisms. The West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey confirmed the findings in 1911, reporting that steamboats on the Monongahela River "could not use the water from some of the pools without ruining their boilers." Water in the Cheat was even worse. "It put locomotives out of commission" and "took the hair off the legs of cattle that stood in it in fly time and was fatal when they drank it." According to Brooks, "scarcely a living fish remain(ed) in Cheat River between its forks and its mouth." These were not isolated conditions, he reported; they were more or less replicated throughout the state.

From the highest to the lowest elevations, the cutting of the virgin forest caused the virtual elimination of entire ecological systems, with profound social and environmental consequences. By the 1920s, even the most strident promoters of West Virginia's industrialization had ample reason to contemplate its consequences. The self-sufficient agriculture that had been the basis of traditional culture now was pushed aside by a modern commercial system. A new market system that had initially seemed reason for optimism among farmers in the deforested mountains now placed them in direct competition with midwestern producers who labored under fewer geographic disadvantages. Then, with the trees gone, the railroads pulled up their tracks and left the newly market-dependent mountain population stranded. When it was all over, the countryside was a forlorn sea of stumps, industrial refuge, and commercially devastated people, abandoned to the more forgiv-



ing forces of nature. Slowly, residents began to drift away, and many of the old mill towns disappeared. The mountains, ever so slowly, and only after a massive public investment, were reclaimed by a new forest.

The system that was expected to "help our people out of the woods" gave West Virginia agriculture a push further down the slide to obscurity. Prior to deforestation, three quarters of the state's population was engaged in farming; at present that figure is below two percent. After more than a century of continuous change, the great industrial transition continues to confound popular notions, as well as our own, of who we are. Ideas about the culture of West Virginians seem to be always one phase behind reality. The idea of the West Virginian as the buckskinclothed frontiersman gave way to the hillbilly, a stereotype given to West Virginians who migrated to the cities after the decline of the timber industry. Even now in 1996, when the single largest work force category in the state is professional services, the popular image of the West Virginian is that of the coal miner. The truth is, coal miners currently make up only five percent or less of the state's work force, and their numbers are declining.

Even though agriculture has declined immensely, West Virginia remains the second most rural state in the country and most of its people continue to live in the rural countryside. As inheritors of a culture shaped by the forest and the mountains, residents have retained many of their ancestors' values, such as independence, adaptability, and self-reliance, qualities that have helped them survive hard times.

Perceived in static rather than dynamic terms, mountaineer culture seems paradoxical. Even though isolationism is one of the persisting perceptions of West Virginia, satellite dishes linking even the most remote residents to the global communications network are so ubiquitous that wits refer to them as the state flower. Alongside the icons of modern life, however, exist relics of the past. Schools often concede to the inevitable and close on the first day of hunting season, euphemistically called "environment day" when students join their elders in preserving a cultural forest ritual that allows people who live in the forest to once again be of the forest, to be hunters for a few days.

Our growing environmental consciousness has spawned yet another transition in the mountains: we now seek to save our woods from the people, because the passing of the virgin forest, which we thought would save the people from the woods, pushed mountain culture to the brink of extinction.

*This article originally appeared in West Virginia University Alumni Magazine, 19(2):10-13.*

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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

As the 2004 session of the West Virginia Legislature draws near, it appears ever more likely that the citizens of the Mountain State will face major industry attacks on clean water, coal regulations, and the state's environmental regulatory structure.

Business and industry believe they have the votes to eliminate or alter the state water quality standards that designate all waters of the state as public drinking water supplies. The coal industry believes it has the votes to roll back environmental regulations that it feels are "more stringent than" federal laws. And the Farm Bureau believes it has the votes to replace the current Environmental Quality Board with some other even more political structure that would give the departments of agriculture and forestry a bigger role in setting water quality standards.

It is difficult for the West Virginia Environmental Council lobby team to prepare for such an onslaught, but we are getting ready. And thanks to Conni Lewis, who has done great work this year as our lobbyist during the Interims sessions, we are ahead of the curve.

At its annual fall meeting, WVEC set its legislative priorities. This was an extremely democratic process in which input was solicited from all the members and member groups. The following is the list of priority issues, listed in order of the number of votes received at the annual meeting:

- 1 Mountaintop Removal
- 2 Water Quantity
- 3 Clean Elections
- 4A Logging Regulations
- 4B Bottle Bill
- 5 ATV Bill
- 6A Air Quality
- 6B Coal ("No More Stringent Than" rollbacks)
- 6C Expand Overweight Coal Truck Penalty
- 6D Electricity Net Metering
- 7A Study Waste Water Treatment
- 7B Coordination of Trails Activities
- 7C Save EQB, (Environmental Quality Board)
- 7D Anti-Sprawl Regulations

WVEC committees and the lobby team are now in the process of honing these priorities into specific issue campaigns. It is our goal to have several pro-active proposals of our own this session. It is unfortunate that we have to spend so much of our limited resources playing defense and fighting off major industry attacks on the environment each year.

This year will be no different.

**How You Can Help:** Join WVEC, or renew your membership, by sending \$25, or whatever you can afford, to WVEC, 1324 Virginia St. E, Charleston, WV 25301. For this contribution you will receive our excellent weekly Legislative Update, by mail or email, so you will know what specific actions you need to take as the session unfolds. Visit our web site at [www.wvecouncil.org](http://www.wvecouncil.org).



*"Gentlemen, start your grinders!"*

## BROCHURES

The Sierra Club, Citizens Coal Council, Coal River Mountain Watch, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Appalachian Focus(Kentucky), Big Sandy Environmental Coalition(Kentucky), Kentuckians For The Commonwealth and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy 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, WVHC, Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306

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

## Speakers Available!

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



## BUMPER STICKERS

To get a free I[heart]Mountains bumper sticker(s), send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Julian Martin, WVHC, Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306

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White, heavy cotton T-Shirts with the I[heart]MOUNTAINS slogan on the front. The lettering is blue and the heart is red. Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL \$8 total by mail. Send sizes wanted and check made out to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy to:

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Appeal Challenges Permit Based on Proximity to Streams, Selenium Discharge, and Lousy "Top-Soil Substitute"

# HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY CHALLENGES LOGAN COUNTY MINE

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and its members in the Island Creek area of Logan County have filed an appeal with the West Virginia Surface Mine Board of a permit issued to CoalMac Coal Company in Logan County.

The appeal raises three issues. The first is that in approving the permit the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection ignored the legal ban on mining within one hundred feet of a stream. The law (known as the buffer zone rule) the buffer zone rule prohibits filling intermittent and perennial streams. prohibits mining within one hundred feet of a stream. The Conservancy contends that, if mining within one hundred feet of a stream is illegal, then filling that stream would be illegal as well.

This will be a landmark case in efforts to rein in mountaintop removal – win or lose. If the appeal is successful in persuading the State courts in West Virginia that the Conservancy's interpretation of the law is the correct one, the size of strip mines in the State will be significantly reduced.

In earlier litigation, Judge Haden of the United States District Court had ruled that the Conservancy's interpretation of the buffer zone rule was the correct one. That ruling was later overturned by the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. In its ruling, the Court of Appeals did not question the lower Court's interpretation of the buffer zone rule. It only ruled that the United

States District Court did not have jurisdiction to make the ruling. The presently pending appeal to the West Virginia Surface Mine Board will give the state courts the opportunity to address this issue.

The second issue raised by the appeal is the failure of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection to consider the potential for toxic selenium discharges from the mine.

The third issue is the inadequacy of the approved topsoil substitute to support the proposed forestland post mining land use. A "topsoil substitute" is material the company plans to use to substitute for the real topsoil that it has buried or dumped into a stream in the course of the mining. The Conservancy contends that the material which the Department of Environmental Protection approved as a "top soil substitute" is inadequate to grow the hardwood forest that the company contends it will establish after the mining is over.

If the State courts in West Virginia agree with the Conservancy's interpretation of the law, the size of strip mines in the State will be significantly reduced and reclamation practices will be improved so that the sites will actually support mixed native hardwood forests after mining.

A hearing on the appeal has been set for January, 2004.

## FEDERAL CLEAN WATER ACT UNDER ATTACK

By Don Gasper

The Bush administration is considering a set of policies that would dramatically reduce the waters covered by the federal Clean Water Act. The policies would:

- Remove ephemeral streams from protection
- Remove protection for many intermittent streams
- Remove protection for "interstate" waters
- Remove federal protection under the Clean Water Act for all wetlands and ponds adjacent to tributaries that fail to meet the definition of "intermittent stream" under the draft rule
- Remove pipes, certain drainages, ditches and other connections between navigable waters and tributaries from federal regulation
- Eliminate Clean Water Act protection for "isolated" waters that have clear connections to interstate commerce through the following types of uses: irrigation, hunting/fishing or other types of recreation, fish or shellfish extraction, industrial intakes, or use by endangered species

Require "regular and continuous flow" between wetlands and tributaries for wetlands to be considered "adjacent" and covered under the Clean Water Act

The change assumes that waters which the proposed rule considers to be "isolated", mostly wet weather ponds, are not "connected" to the larger streams which the rule considers worthy of protection. Hydrologists know, however, that they are connected by underground seepage water to stream channels. Such slow delivery prevents floods and promotes stream flow below in dry periods. "Intrastate" means streams small enough that they do not cross state boundaries would upstream be exempt from federal protective "oversight" of state water quality standards. As a headwater state, West Virginia has many small streams and could be dramatically affected by this change.

To counteract these proposed changes, both the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives have proposed an amendment to the Clean Water Act. That amendment would replace the term "navigable waters," throughout the Act, with the term "waters of the United States," defined to

mean all waters subject to the ebb and flow of the tide, the territorial seas, and all interstate and intrastate waters and their tributaries, including lakes, rivers, streams (including intermittent streams), mudflats, sandflats, wetlands, sloughs, prairie potholes, wet meadows, playa lakes, natural ponds, and all impoundments of the foregoing, to the fullest extent that these waters, or activities affecting them, are subject to the legislative power of Congress under the Constitution.

The proposal is known as the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act of 2003. If enacted, this Clean Water Authority Restoration Act would prevent the Bush Administration's changes by clarifying that the Act is to protect all waters and not allow the Administration to exclude any waters.

Citizens everywhere should write Congress to protect stream water quality and our drinking water. For 30 years the Clean Water Act has been our progressive program "to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's water." Citizens have a lot at stake in this systematic subversion of the Clean Water Act's clean-up.

## CONSERVANCY OPPOSES ACID MINE DRAINAGE

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, along the West Virginia Rivers Coalition and Trout Unlimited, has intervened in an appeal by Mettiki Coal of a denial of its request to expand its longwall mining operations in Grant County, West Virginia.

The controversy arose when Mettiki Coal sought to open its proposed E Mine. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection denied the application. In doing so, it cited concerns that the operation "will create acid mine drainage that will leave the permit area requiring chemical treatment for an indefinite period of time." In the denial, the Department of Environmental Protection noted that the proposed mine was not "designed to prevent long-term material damage to the hydrologic balance outside the permit area." The mine would also create a perpetual discharge of water requiring treatment to meet water quality standards.

Mettiki Coal has appealed this decision by the Department of Environmental Protection to the West Virginia Surface Mine Board. The Highlands Conservancy, Rivers Coalition, and Trout Unlimited have intervened to support the WV Department of Environmental Protection.

The proposed underground operation would mine beneath tributaries of the Potomac and Blackwater Rivers. The targeted coal seam is highly acid producing. WVDEP's denial upholds current federal and state policies and regulations outlawing mining operations that will result in long term acid mine drainage (AMD).

Historically, the drainage of acid water from abandoned mines has been one of the most serious problems in parts of West Virginia and surrounding states where acid producing seams are located. Much of the acid drainage is treated while the mines are operating. When the mines are abandoned, the drainage either goes untreated or is treated at enormous expense. The expense is so great in part because the acid mine drainage, and the necessity of treating it, may be expected to continue for a very long time. While it does not continue literally forever, it does continue for such a long time that in planning how society deals with it, it may as well last forever.

Because of this, it has become state law and policy to avoid this problem by not allowing mining that would result in long term discharge of water that would require treatment. The denial of the

Mettiki Coal permit carries out these policies.

Though media attention to acid mine drainage has dwindled with the more recent shift to mining in lower sulfur coal seams and the massively destructive mountaintop removal operations, long term acid mine drainage from mining in acid prone areas in the 1980's and 90's has left a devastating legacy. Low pH, and heavy loads of metals including iron, manganese and aluminum from those operations have killed thousands of miles of streams and created astronomical treatment costs, as well as large deficits in state reclamation funds (predicted to be in the millions of dollars in West Virginia alone). Extensive pools of acid water have also flooded underground mine workings in northern West Virginia and the pressure in these pools has begun to force the acid water to break out into streams and wells further contaminating waters in the area.

Permitting the Mettiki "E" mine will once again open the door for additional mining throughout acid prone areas across the country and further destruction of surface and ground waters for recreational, domestic and industrial use in major portions of PA, WV, KY, Tenn. Ill. and Ohio.

In addition to legal action there is political action as well. Governor Wise's former Chief of Staff has joined ranks with Mettiki Coal Company and continues to pressure WVDEP to back down on the denial. Yielding to pressure to reverse this decision will turn back the clock on decades of work by citizens across the state, region and nation to hold firm the sections of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and the Clean Water Act that prohibit the production of AMD.

At press time no hearing date had been set on the appeal.



*Rainbow trout, drawing by Bob Savannah*

"Two thumbs up on this denial. Thank you!"

## ENVIRONMENTAL GOOD NEWS

By Don Gasper

### OUTDOOR GOOD NEWS

A lot of people who care about the outdoors should be interested in this good news in Tucker County and near our Monongahela National Forest. Trout anglers have a lot of catchable-size trout stocked waters. Additionally they have a few wild-trout fisheries, and there are a few more of these because of the addition of sand-sized limestone to headwaters of suitable streams. These streams have become too acid for fish due to Acid Rain or a little acid mine drainage.

Red Run of Dry Fork east of Parsons is one such stream in an area without richness that would neutralize Acid Rain. As there were no fish, limestone was put into its headwaters and Native Brook Trout were reintroduced by W.V. D.N.R. This population has now developed into

a fishery that could now be fished with even a limited harvest. It has always been a beautiful stream; now it has a wild fishery with a beautiful most appropriate fish - our Native Brook Trout.

We must stop Acid Rain, of course, and landscape and stream acidification. This is a band-aid, quick-fix, like taking a headache powder for brain cancer - but it works. Citizens can help by speaking up for clean air. The stream must be treated every year and costs money - but it has brought back a rare and superb fishing opportunity.

There is another superb opportunity developing in the Red Creek-Dolly Sods area. The U.S. Forest Service has acquired an area above the Dolly Sods Wilderness, nearly as large as the Wilderness itself. All this area has been heavily used by backpackers and campers. This

new "High Sods" will surely be made a part of the present Dolly Sods Wilderness. Eventually all the Red Creek drainage above the cabins area at the South Prong will be a part of a greater Red Creek/Dolly Sods Wilderness Area. There is a head-most about 1,000 acres of Red Creek that remains to be purchased by the U.S. Forest Service to complete the drainage. Citizens can urge officials to do this so all this can come about. It will all be unsettled and wild. It is a fragile ecosystem and can only support the dispersed foot travel of Wilderness.

The South Prong, at the cabins, with only a few Native Brook Trout at the mouth in summer (that many cabin owners note) will get ex-

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# WILDERNESS CAMPAIGN UPDATE

By Matt Keller

As we head into the holiday season, our wilderness campaign is shifting even more to a grassroots focus. We've done the work of inventorying and evaluating potential wilderness areas and have a solid list of places that deserve to be included in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Already, numerous individuals have written our elected officials in Washington in support of more wilderness in the state. Over 20 businesses have formally endorsed our work and have agreed to help out in some capacity. Many other organizations across the state and nation have pledged their support to our efforts.

As we continue to build up this framework of support, the much harder business of convincing political bodies to sign on becomes more reasonable. In fact, both the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the town of Lewisburg have formally endorsed our work. They realize that wilderness is not just good for the soul, but good for communities. The West Virginia congressional delegation has taken notice. As we show more and more broad based support, they become more willing to work with us to craft wilderness legislation for the state.

While we have laid solid groundwork, we still have a long row to hoe. Some of you recently received a letter in the mail from the wilderness coalition. It was a request for you to get involved in the effort to protect our special wild places on the Monongahela National Forest by writing the folks we send to Washington DC to represent our interests. We sent this out to Highlands Conservancy members in the counties where potential wilderness areas are. We felt it was important for the congressional delegation to hear first from West Virginians who live near these special places. I hope sincerely that you can find time to tell your senators and representatives that wilderness is important and that the 'wild' will only stay in wonderful West Virginia through additional wilderness designations.

I've been asked many times: Why Wilderness? Why isn't 6.2 (the Forest Service's management prescription for 'semi-primitive non-motorized' areas) good enough? My answer is simple: permanence. The Forest Service is under dynamic political pressure as administrations come and go. Management plan revisions, like the one in progress now on the Monongahela National Forest, can radically change how ar-

reas are managed. A favorite fly-casting spot could be developed for oil and gas or a hiking trail turned into a logging road.

Even while an area is supposedly managed as a 'semi-primitive non-motorized' area (known as a "6.2 area"), management decisions can be made that compromise the ecological sensitivity of an area. This past October, the Cranberry Backcountry was opened twice to motorized vehicles with over 1,000 cars in two weekends running through an area that has been historically managed as de facto wilderness. My point is, things can change. Fortunately, a chance to change things for the better is upon us now. We have the opportunity and the means to protect our remaining wild places for future generations. Our web site has resources for people interested in writing a letter in support of more wilderness. At [http://www.wvwild.org/get\\_involved](http://www.wvwild.org/get_involved), you will find talking points for a letter as well the addresses for our elected officials. If you are not on the internet but would still like to utilize these resources, please contact me at (304)864-5530.



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perimental limestone fine treatment in the headwaters. This will be another marvelous little "restored" Brook Trout fishing opportunity in a most appropriate setting on the National Forest.

An even more appropriate setting exists in the proposed wilderness area. "Big" Stonecoal Run is too acid for any fish. (There is no mine drainage.) It acidifies main Red Creek every spring below where it enters for about two miles - until Greenbrier Limestone springs enter and neutralize it below the cabins. Main Red Creek then has no fish in it in the springtime today. The Wilderness Area boundary will be drawn around the head of "Big" Stonecoal Run to allow public access and eventually camping. Trucks with sand-sized limestone can then reach it. If the experimental treatment in the South Prong is successful, "Big" Stonecoal will be treated. This will be nearly an 8 mile long walk-in Native Brook Trout fishery - where none has ever existed, even perhaps in the original forest. Also it will allow main Red Creek in the present Wilderness Area to support trout year-round.

Lastly on the east side of the larger proposed Red Creek/Dolly Sods Wilderness Area Alder Run headwaters will have a similar access

and treatment. It has no fish presently, but will be stocked once with Native Brook Trout from a stream below from the same drainage to get them started. (All the natives used in these stockings will come from this stream - only a few are needed to get them started.) After a few years Alder Run will become a true feeder stream producing many little Brook Trout for upper Red Creek. Alder Run will not be much of a fishery itself as it is mostly boulder covered, but it will be the up-stream-most source of Brook Trout for Red Creek. (There are no Brook Trout in upper Red Creek - it is too warm.)

This is great news. There is no better indicator of a quality environment than wild trout fisheries. Citizens desire it for their own quality of life - businesses do too. To actually create these opportunities, and to create a larger Red Creek/Dolly Sods Wilderness Area that will sustain itself in face of very heavy future use - is rare and wonderful. Much of this is not yet a reality, and citizens have an opportunity to make it happen. They can write to the U.S.F.S. and D.N.R. to ask them to work to make it happen.

Mr. Gasper is a retired fish biologist with 30+ years experience on the Monongahela's trout streams.

## SQUIRREL INVASION SOWS SEEDS OF CHANGE FOR FUTURE FORESTS

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - As squirrels gather nuts for winter, they also plant the seeds of future forests - but the different ways squirrel species hoard nuts, coupled with changes in squirrel populations, may significantly alter the course of forest regeneration, according to a Purdue University study.

The study examined differences in the hoarding behavior of red squirrels and gray squirrels in west-central Indiana. The researchers used that information to develop a model that predicts how these differences may influence germination, or sprouting, of black walnut trees, a major component of the central hardwoods forest and the food of choice for both species.

"This is the first study I'm aware of that's explicitly looked at how two different species and their behavioral characteristics could influence forest regeneration," said Rob Swihart, professor of wildlife ecology.

In the study, Swihart and his colleague Jake Goheen, a former Purdue student now at the University of New Mexico, predicted that seven times as many walnuts germinate when gathered by gray squirrels compared to those hoarded by red squirrels.

"If our results are widely applicable, the processes by which trees propagate will be significantly altered as more red squirrels move into the landscape," Goheen said.

Unlike gray squirrels, red squirrels are not native to Indiana and only began to spread throughout the state within about the past century. At the same time, the number of gray squirrels in forests began to decline as more forest habitat was converted for agriculture, he said.

The problem with this shift in species is that gray squirrels and red squirrels don't store nuts and seeds in the same way, and they play different roles in the forest community, Goheen said.

Gray squirrels use what ecologists call "scatter hoarding," in which they bury single nuts, such as acorns and walnuts, in numerous locations.

Being a bit squirrely, gray squirrels seldom remember where they bury every nut. This ensures that some nuts remain in the ground to germinate the following spring.

"Scatter hoarding by gray squirrels is important to the germination success of these nuts," Swihart said. "They're buried, so they don't dry out, and they're placed in a location suitable for germination, so they're able to sprout and grow."

But that's not the case with nuts gathered by red squirrels, Swihart said. This species practices "larder hoarding," in which individuals collect nuts and store them in large piles above the surface. "Larder hoards are basically death traps for seeds," Swihart said.

"Unlike gray squirrels, it is very unlikely that red squirrels will aid in the dispersal and germination success of the tree species that we have here in the central hardwoods region. Red squirrels just aren't wired that way."

While ecologists aren't sure why the red squirrel's range expanded into Indiana from its native coniferous forests, Swihart and Goheen believe changes in the state's landscape over the past century have helped red squirrels gain a foothold.



"The red squirrel is a symptom of an environmental problem more than a cause," Goheen said. "Red squirrels have only been able to invade here because of widespread fragmentation of forested land cleared for agriculture."

The gray squirrel, the bane of many a backyard birdfeeder, is actually a forest dweller that is highly sensitive to forest fragmentation and habitat loss, Swihart said. "It comes as a surprise to many people, but the gray squirrel is very much a forest species," Swihart said. "One of the real enigmas associated with gray squirrels is if they're so sensitive to habitat fragmentation, why do we have them all over college campuses and in our backyards?"

It turns out gray squirrels just aren't too bright when it comes to avoiding predators. "Gray squirrels tend to do very well in places where predators are absent, like campuses and suburban neighborhoods, but they just aren't as vigilant and wary of predators as other squirrel species are, and that can get them into trouble in other settings," Swihart said.

That kind of trouble becomes apparent when gray squirrels try to travel across the agricultural fields that separate many of the small patches of remaining forest throughout Indiana.

Further confounding the topic of forest regeneration is Indiana's history of fire suppression.

"While squirrels play an important role, they're not the sole driving force behind regeneration of trees like oaks, hickories and

walnuts," Swihart said. "The problem is that we've suppressed disturbances, like fires, which these species depend on to periodically make room for new trees to sprout up."

"The issue now is that gray squirrels are absolutely essential if we're going to have regeneration in the absence of disturbance. They provide the only mechanism by which acorns and other nuts can get far enough away from the shade of the parent tree to have a chance of succeeding."

The continued regeneration of the central hardwoods forest depends in part on maintaining a healthy gray squirrel population - not on college campuses, but in forests. To achieve that goal, Swihart suggests making simple changes in land-use practices.

"We need to recognize that the extent to which we've altered the landscape so far has really had an effect," he said. "By doing little things, such as ensuring that we have better connectivity between our forest patches, we can augment the number of species of wildlife we help in the end."

The study was published in the September issue of the *Canadian Journal of Zoology*.

**Editorial note: It is the general editorial policy of *The Highlands Voice* to concentrate first upon things the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is directly involved in and then upon issues affecting West Virginia and the highlands. So why are we talking about squirrels in Indiana? Because the story illustrates so well the great web of life, a principle that we all talk about so often in the abstract. Who would have imagined that fragmenting the forest means fewer nut trees because a fragmented forest contains different species of squirrels? Plucking at the squirrel thread over here results in changes in tree regeneration over there which results in something else over there, on and on, in a system we can't even understand much less manage.**

**Budding naturalist Katherine Grace McFerrin, age 3, and I have observed a gray squirrel burying black walnuts in our back yard. We hope he remembers to come back and get them this winter since we had a sandbox penciled in for that spot come spring.**

**Thanks to Jonathan Jessup for calling this story to my attention.**