

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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Policies on Threatened and Endangered Species at Issue

FOREST SERVICE PLANS TO AMEND MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST

By Dave Saville

The Monongahela National Forest (Mon) is currently going through the process of amending the threatened and endangered species portion of its management plan. The purpose is to ensure pertinent new information for threatened and endangered species is incorporated into existing Forest Plan direction, standards and monitoring requirements. The Environmental Assessment and all the associated documents are easily accessed on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf Click on "Forest Planning" then you will see "Threatened and Endangered Species Amendment."

This amendment has been in the works for over two years. Early in the process the Forest Service did what is called "scoping." In "scoping" the Forest Service decides how it will do the Environmental Assessment and determines what things are to be addressed in that Assessment. In this case, the initial scoping for this Environmental Assessment was released over a year before the Biological Opinion from the Fish and Wildlife Service had been completed.

The long term effects of this amendment to the management plan come from its influence upon the Forest Service's policy toward threatened and endangered species in the Monongahela National Forest. The management plan is the Forest Service's blueprint for how it manages the Forest. If the threatened and endangered species portion of its management plan is inadequate

then the Forest Service will be working from an inadequate blueprint.

The short term effect of this amendment will probably be more new timbering projects. New timbering projects are mostly at a stand-still until this amendment is complete. We fear that once the amendment is finalized, the Forest Service intends to live up to its promise to triple the logging on the Mon.

As those who have been following Monongahela National Forest issues closely know, the entire Forest Plan is in the process of being revised. Plan revisions are required under NFMA every 10-15 years. Because of the implications to the timber program, the Forest Service has put the Threatened & Endangered species portion of the plan on an expedited timeline. We have been successful so far in having the comment period for this plan amendment extended until March 31. With the help of planning experts and biologists from The Wilderness Society, we are analyzing these documents and this process very carefully.

If you have not received this important Environmental Assessment in the mail, it is easily viewed at the web location shown above. Please review it carefully and send in your comments, however brief. Also, please write to the Forest Service at 200 Sycamore St. Elkins, WV 26241 and request to be put on their mailing list for Forest actions.

What's Inside					
Thoughts from President Frank	2	How to join	9	Talking about Roaring Plains	15
Roster of officers and chairs	2	Dues going up	9	Roads in the National Forest	16
Conservancy's wind power position	3	Mountaintop removal fight goes on	10	Blackwater hiking trail	17
Lifetime memberships awarded	4	Two endangered friends	11	Book news	18
Fall review plans	5	Roads in the National Forest	12	Reliable signs of spring	19
Legislative update	6	Delay in Mtn. Top Removal study	12	Readers write	19
The value of wilderness	7	Corridor H construction waste	13	Green entrepreneurs of the year	20
Air quality initiative	7	New guy starts work on wilderness	13		
Balsam fir tree project	8	Good stuff for free	14		
Fighting for endangered species	8	Outings schedule	14		

From the Western Slope

by Frank Young

Eating our Cake

Almost nothing causes some of us to focus on our modern "lifestyles" more than being without the contrived comforts we've come to take for granted. Recently my wife and I and our two sons and their families and the entire community of Ripley and most of larger Jackson and Mason Counties, along with parts of other adjoining counties, spent three days and nights without the "utility" of electricity. A mid-February snow and ice storm brought ice laden trees down into power transmission lines causing short circuits, downed lines, broken poles and untold miseries to our modern lives- so dependent on this invisible energy we call electricity.

Many people went without this modern "convenience" for 10 days or more. During those days we fretted about keeping our homes warm, our refrigerators and freezers cold, the lack of hot water, computer, a usable microwave oven to defrost a TV dinner- there being no power for the television anyway- and which dinner was already defrosted because the storage freezer was powerless.

During the course of some of this I began musing about how ridiculous this all seemed- can't freeze, can't thaw, can't keep the shower water hot nor the drinking water cold (fortunately, due to a good water storage system and frugal usage we had water throughout the "outage"). Finally it dawned on us to put the water, milk, cheese and other "fixins" in a "cooler" outside to stay cool. Well yeah- duhhhhh.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, our organization and the larger world struggled with how and how not to keep a supply of energy, mostly in the form of electricity in the "local" debates of today, flowing endlessly to meet our insatiable energy appetites.

We produce electricity by burning fuels- mostly coal in West Virginia, with a sprinkle of natural gas and hydro-power. Fuel burning creates heat that turns water into steam; that steam drives turbines that in turn drive electrical generators. Hydro turbines put the energy of gravity powered water directly onto the turbines that spin the electricity generators. Wind powered turbines put the power of the wind directly into the electricity generators.

To harvest the power of gravity powered water a stream or river is usually artificially ponded with a dam that restricts the natural flow of the waterway, with all the accompanying ecological disruption, and the churning turbines themselves can chop creatures that live in the water into mincemeat.

To harvest the power of wind we must construct turbines where the wind blows. In West Virginia that's usually on the tops of high mountains.

To burn coal it must first be mined- a demonstrated horrific ecological disturbance by any method or measure.

And of course, in burning coal, natural gas or other "fossil fuels" there is produced prodigious amounts of ash residue, airborne particulate matter, carbon dioxide and myriad numbers of other by-products of the combustion.

But we valued the beauty and the ecological resources of that free flowing stream that we interrupted so as to operate the hydro-turbines. We valued the majestic mountain tops the coal mines destroyed or that the wind turbines marred. We valued the streams and rivers that flowed from the mountains from which the coal mining induced acids and other deadly wastes now flow. We valued the life forms whose lives and habitats are snuffed out and disrupted or obliterated by these destructive pursuits of more and more energy.

All these things- the natural world of clean streams uninterrupted in their flows and teaming with the web of aquatic flora and fauna, of majestic mountains and their wider vistas unmarred by artificial contraptions taller the trees, and of clean air and clear skies free of breath strangling noxiousness and the looming specter of yet unknown degrees of runaway climate changes- all these things we value and celebrate as the best of what nature offers to tantalize our senses and to provide the basic ingredients for enjoyment of life- and yes, of even basic survival. All these are things we treasure. They are what the good life is about. They are the cake of life.

In demanding more and more and more of the nebulous but costly commodity we call "energy" we are, with current mass energy production technologies, voraciously consuming the resources of life.

We are eating our cake. Where are we going in this handbasket together?

Roster of Officers, Board Members and Committee Chairs

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT: Judy Rodd, Environmental Services and Education Center 501 Elizabeth St., Charleston, WV 25311, (304)345-7663, roddj@hotmail.com

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STATE AFFAIRS: Carroll Jett, 397 Claylick Road, Sherman, WV 26164, (304) 273-5247, carrolljett@yahoo.com.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR FEDERAL AFFAIRS: Peter Shoenfeld, 713 Chesapeake Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301)587-6197, peter@mountain.net.

SECRETARY: Hugh Rogers, Moon Run, Kerens, WV 26276, (304)636-2662, rogers@wvhighlands.org.

TREASURER: Bob Marshall, 886-Z Divide Ridge Road, Kenna WV 25248 (304)372-7501, woodhavenwva@netscape.net

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

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2003)

Sayre Rodman, 32 Crystal Dr., Oakmont, PA 15139, (412)828-8983, 73210.540@compuserve.com.

Don Garvin, PO Box 666, Buckhannon, WV 26201, (304)472-8716, DSGJr@aol.com.

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

Bob Marshall, 886-Z Divide Ridge Road, Kenna WV 25248 (304)372-7501, woodhavenwva@netscape.net.

Jonathan Jessup, 8225 Adenlee Ave. #40 Fairfax VA 22031 703-204-1372 jonathanjessup@hotmail.com

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2004)

Bob Gates, 1117 Virginia St.E., Charleston, WV 25301, (304)342-2624, photonzx@ntelos.net.

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

Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Rd., Charleston, WV 25314, (304) 342-8989, imaginemew@aol.com

Bill McNeel, 1118 Second Ave., Marlinton, WV 24954, (304)799-4369

Pam Moe, Rt. 1, Box 29B, Kerens, WV 26276, (304) 478-4922, pam_moe@hotmail.com

ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTORS

NATIONAL SPELEOLOGICAL SOCIETY—Virginia Region: Judy Fisher, PO Box 276, Berkeley Springs, WV 26411, (304)258-4974.

PITTSBURGH CLIMBERS: Jean Rodman, 32 Crystal Dr., Oakmont, PA 15139, (412)828-8983, 73210.540@compuserve.com.

BROOKS BIRD CLUB: Mary Moore Rieffenburger, Rt. 1, Box 253, Elkins, WV 26241, (304)636-4559.

MOUNTAINEER CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED: Frank Slider, Rt 1 Box 163-A2, Middlebourne, WV 26149, Phone: 304-758-2500 sliderf@ovis.net

WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION: Abby Chapple, PO Box 370, Great Cacapon, WV 25422, (304)947-7590, abbyc@aol.com

DOWNSTREAM ALLIANCE: Craig Mains, 137 Hoffman Ave., Morgantown WV 26505, cmains@wvu.edu

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

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

PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: Sayre Rodman, 32 Crystal Dr., Oakmont, PA 15139, (412)828-8983, 73210.540@compuserve.com, Bob Marshall, 201 Virginia St.W., Charleston, WV 25302, (304)345-5518, woodhavenwva@netscape.net.

OUTREACH/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE: Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Rd., Charleston, WV 25314, (304) 342-8989, imaginemew@aol.com

BLACKWATER CANYON COMMITTEE: co-chairs Linda Cooper, J1 1220 Van Voorhis Road Morgantown, WV 26505 (304)296-0565 lcooper@hsc.wvu.edu, and Judy Rodd, Environmental Services and Education Center 501 Elizabeth St., Charleston, WV 25311, (304)345-7663, roddj@hotmail.com

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Bob Marshall, 886-Z Divide Ridge Road, Kenna WV 25248 (304)372-7501, woodhavenwva@netscape.net

WIND POWER SUBCOMMITTEE: Peter Shoenfeld, 713 Chesapeake Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301)587-6197, peter@mountain.net.

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

RIVERS COMMITTEE: Abby Chapple, PO Box 370, Great Cacapon, WV 25422, (304)947-7590, abbyc@aol.com

HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: Hugh Rogers, Moon Run, Kerens, WV 26276, (304)636-2662, rogers@wvhighlands.org.

OUTINGS COMMITTEE: Jack Slocumb, 511 Washington St., #8, Cumberland, MD 21502, (301)777-8810, jslocumb@prodigy.net

MISCELLANEOUS OFFICES

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

WEB PAGE: Peter Shoenfeld, 713 Chesapeake Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301)587-6197, peter@mountain.net.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

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

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

Where we are and how we got there

WHERE DOES THE HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY STAND ON WIND POWER?

By Peter Shoenfeld

Six wind energy projects have surfaced in West Virginia's Allegheny Highlands in the last 30 months. This has raised contentious issues for the Conservancy— green power on the one hand vs. visual and suggested ecological impacts on the other. The contention continues, but out of it policy is evolving. I will soon tell you what I think this policy is, but first I want to talk a bit about our processes.

The Highlands Voice now reports on Board meetings and other Conservancy policy actions. But it reports many other things as well; editorial policy leans toward publishing whatever members submit. On wind energy, members have a wide range of views, and the Voice has printed these.

Personal pronouncements in the press by Highlands Conservancy officers do not always represent policy either. On wind energy, both our President and Senior Vice President hold strong, often opposing, personal views, and neither has been shy about announcing them.

Conservancy policies are set by its Board of Directors. The leg work is delegated to committees, established by the President. There has been a wind energy committee since 2000, currently chaired by yours truly. This Committee and the Board have been active on wind energy. Policy can be discerned by looking at their actions.

Review of Committee and Board actions show that current Conservancy policy seems to be this:

— To resist installation of the new, very tall turbines in critical locations where there is extreme adverse visual impact on presently pristine, popularly prized vistas.

— To press for siting regulation and thorough review by responsible public agencies.

— To protect endangered species and prevent major avian impact, to the extent we believe a threat exists.

— Otherwise, to welcome and support wind energy development.

That this is the policy can be seen from the history of Board and Committee actions:

The Committee and Board first challenged, but then supported and now participates in the Backbone Mountain project. The developer's offer to reduce visual impact by eliminating the southern portion of the project was accepted, and the Conservancy now participates in the committee established to monitor avian impact. Since not enough is known about avian impact, this committee's work is very important, and should influence future policy.

The next proposed project was in the same area, on Stemple Ridge, by Mega-Energy. The developer consulted the committee, was told that we'd want ecological surveys, and shortly thereafter withdrew their application.

The Conservancy did not become involved in the US Wind Force Grant County project. Our societal role is to throw sand in the wheels of what others consider to be progress when the environmental consequences appear too great. When we abstain from doing that, this is as close to support as we are likely to come. All our public pronouncements have supported wind power as a gen-

eral proposition. Since we are not investors, we have little else to contribute.

On the Dominion Power project near Snowy Point, the Committee met once with the developers. They told us their plans, and we told them our concerns. Not long after that they discovered extensive Northern Flying Squirrel habitation on their site, and withdrew their PSC application. That they were influenced in this decision by our and other citizen's concern for endangered species may be inferred.

The Nedpower Allegheny Front project continues to be extremely contentious within our organization. Our President publicly supports this project, while our Senior Vice President publicly opposes it. In the fall, the Committee negotiated an agreement, similar to what had been done on Backbone. The Board rejected that agreement, but did pass two resolutions that provide policy guidance for the future.

The first resolution stated that the Conservancy "does not support permits for wind power projects that would degrade scenic vistas from Canaan Valley, Dolly Sods, Seneca Rocks, Spruce Knob and other special places in West Virginia." This is now our policy. True, it does not list all the "special places" or provide a definition of what it takes to "degrade scenic vistas." But it does provide useful guidance in analyzing proposed projects.

The second resolution demanded "siting criteria including viewshed analysis and full environmental impact analysis." This was implemented by a "Letter of Conditional Support for Windpower," sent to the state Public Service Commission.

Next came Rich Mountain. All previous projects had been located near the Maryland line, north of almost all of the Monongahela National Forest. But the Rich Mountain site is right in the middle of the northern Mon's most special places. Rich Mountain is a high, steep, and very visible, ridge, surrounded by the four Wilderness areas (Dolly Sods, Otter Creek, Laurel Fork North and South), the Spruce Knob/Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area, and the Roaring Plains special interest area. For this reason, and in keeping with the policy on special places, the Board had no difficulty reaching a decision to accept the Committee's recommendation to oppose this project.

How our policy will evolve or play out in the future remains to be seen. We do not know where future projects will be proposed. Nor do we have a list of special places ready to compare to such proposals. We are interested in developing a forecast of promising sites for wind projects, and in analyzing their suitability from our perspective. Hopefully, this would free us from acting in a purely reactionary mode and allow us to adopt a more positive stance toward some sites.

GENTLE REMINDERS

The Spring Review is now scheduled for April 25-27, 2003. This will include the spring Board meeting.

Summer Board meeting and fall Review will be July 19, 2003, and October 24-26, 2003, respectively. For more details (such as there are) about the fall Review, see story on p. 5.

ALLEN deHART AND BRUCE SUNDQUIST MADE LIFETIME MEMBERS

By John McFerrin

The Board of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has voted to recognize the decades long contributions of Allen deHart and Bruce Sundquist by making them lifetime members. This is a rare step for the Board, one it had taken only three times before in our thirty five year history. In taking this step, the Board recognized that neither canonization nor awarding the Nobel Peace Prize was within its authority but it did what it could.

Mr. deHart and Mr. Sundquist's most visible contribution to the well being of the Conservancy has been through their efforts on the Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide. They were both there, more or less, when it began and have regularly updated it for new editions. Bruce has always assumed an enormous responsibility in its distribution. The Hiking Guide has, in turn, been of enormous value both as a steady fundraiser and in making the Monongahela National Forest that has always been so precious to the Conservancy more easily accessible to the public. Through the Guide, we were able to publicize the Conservancy as a group with a longstanding interest in the Forest. It was in appreciation for these invaluable contributions to the Conservancy that the Board voted to recognize Mr. deHart and Mr. Sundquist as lifetime members.

More complete biographies of Mr. deHart and Mr. Sundquist appear in this issue.

ALLEN deHART

By Helen McGinnis

Most members of the Highlands Conservancy know that Allen is co-author of the Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide. A visit to amazon.com shows this is by no means his only guide. Others include North Carolina Hiking Trails; Adventuring in Florida and the Sea Islands of Georgia; West Virginia Hiking Trails: Hiking the Mountain State; Hiking South Carolina Trails; The Trails of Virginia: Hiking the Old Dominion; Hiking North Carolina's

Mountains-To-Sea Trail; Adventuring in Florida: the Sierra Club Trail Guide to the Sunshine State and the Islands and Okefenokee Swamp of Georgia; and Trails of the Triangle: 170 Hikes in the Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill Area. He has been hiking and writing about trails for almost 60 years and has hiked more than 27,000 miles.

For his latest guide, about the Mountains-To-Sea Trail, Allen hiked 934 miles in two months in 1997. The trail is a combination of on-road and off-road



trails, beginning at Clingmans Dome in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and ending on the North Carolina coast. The guide includes a great deal of history, including stories about various points on the trail.

With such an impressive list of hiking guides to his credit, you might assume that Allen has devoted the greatest part of his life to hiking trails and writing about them. But you would be wrong. Hiking is only one of his lives.

His parents were artists and musicians. By the age of ten, he was designing greeting cards and writing poetic illustrations, which he sold to buy a typewriter and a bicycle. By the age of fifteen he had created his own concert band. At age 16 he received a Merit Scholarship to the Minneapolis School of Art. In between sessions he was a teen-aged reporter and photographer. He was an honors graduate of the U.S. Army's Adjutant General School in public relations, and then served in the US Army diplomatic courier service in Europe and the Middle East. He was the creator of the German/American Cultural Exchange for concert performances at military bases around the world.

(More on p. 5)

BRUCE SUNDQUIST

By Helen McGinnis

I met Bruce around 1969. I was full of enthusiasm about promoting the Dolly Sods as a wilderness area and had come up with a short Xeroxed description of the area and a trail map that was intended to get others interested. Bruce was an accomplished white water person and backpacker. He'd already become involved in editing hiking and canoeing guides; as I recall—a canoeing guide to western Pennsylvania and two hikers' guides to specific parts of Pennsylvania. He told me that he wanted to become involved in environmental issues and volunteered to publish an expanded version of my guide.

During those times Bruce converted his entire basement into a shop for duplicating topographic maps and printing and collating guides. For map copying, he purchased a large camera that took 8X10" negatives and mounted it on a track on the ceiling. He did all the work himself except for the typing. Although he functioned as editor and publisher, he also wrote substantial parts of some of the guides. His garage was given over to storage of the printed guides, in boxes reaching to the ceiling.

Working with me, Sayre Rodman, the late Vic Schmidt, and George Langford, he oversaw the writing and publishing of the three wilderness proposals/guides for Dolly Sods, Otter Creek and the Cranberry Backcountry. Each went through several editions and included updated inserts, soliciting membership in the Conservancy and urging readers to contact their legislators.

The guides to these three areas naturally evolved into the comprehensive Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide, now in its 7th edition. It has consistently been the Conservancy's number one moneymaker. At first Bruce depended on volunteer hikers



(More on p. 5)

More about Allen deHart (continued from p. 4)

He graduated from three US colleges as well. Now he is a professor emeritus at Louisburg College in North Carolina. He taught history and psychology there for 40 years. He has been instrumental in promoting and getting funding for a variety of cultural endeavors at the college—concerts, lectures, and movies—to the point that the annual concert series is known as the Allen de Hart Concert Series. Last March, according to the Classical Voice North Carolina website, “He was present in the lobby, tending to the ticket table and regaling his friends with tales of his latest hiking escapades.”

De Hart also worked to renovate and preserve historic buildings on the campus. He founded the De Hart Botanical Gardens, and also the International Whistler’s Convention, which has been held annually at the college for at least 27 years.

His list of publications includes much more than hiking guides. He has written two textbooks on the colonial history of Prince George County, Virginia and another on the Systems Approach to Learning. He has published literally thousand of articles on a variety of subjects, including cultural arts, in magazines and newspapers. He has won numerous awards for his support of the humanities.

Allen belongs to many conservation and outdoor organizations and has been a Scoutmaster with the Boy Scouts. He was awarded the United States Presidential Award for Backpacking each year between 1974 and 1978. In 1978 he completed the Appalachian Trail and won the AT Conference Award.

Allen is still listed as a part-time faculty member at Louisburg College. His subject: Hiking.

More about Bruce Sundquist (continued from p. 4)

for information and updates, but this was not entirely satisfactory. He reached an agreement with Allen de Hart, who had published his own hikers’ guide to West Virginia. From then on, Allen did most of the trail exploration and descriptions in return for a small royalty.

Meanwhile, Bruce was editing and publishing other guides. I don’t think it would be an exaggeration to say there are at least ten other hiking and canoeing guides for Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Virginia that might not exist without his input.

Bruce holds a PhD in Metallurgy. When I first met him, he and George Langford were research scientists for US Steel. When financial hard times led to the closure of this lab, Bruce went to work for Westinghouse, researching the possible reactions of steel rods in the proposed breeder-reactor nuclear power plants. When this effort shut down, Bruce elected to take early retirement. Now he had even more time to devote to environmental issues and the guides. His interest in canoeing and hiking segued into researching general forestry issues, and from there into collecting information on human impacts on soils worldwide.

Then he went on to tackle the greatest threat to life on Earth since that asteroid slammed in the planet and exterminated the dinosaurs 65 million years ago—human population growth. Many of us are deeply concerned about population but don’t really know what to do. Bruce didn’t hesitate to wade in, beginning a massive research project on world population growth. He set up his own website to make this research available to everyone. (<http://www.alltel.net/~bsundquist1/ffp.html>).

I left this part of the country in the mid 1970s. In California, 3 or 4 years ago, I met him again on the pages of Planned Parenthood’s newsletter. He’d reached an agreement to leave all his resources to the organization upon his death—an agreement that PP found so significant that they put his picture on their front page.

In the years since his retirement, Bruce has undergone surgery for colon cancer and recently, to correct a heart valve problem. He has come through both. He’s won numerous citations for service to his community—Monroeville PA. Right now he’s looking for someone else to take over editing and publishing the Mon guide. Whoever does, it’s unlikely that s/he be able to duplicate Bruce’s tremendous dedication. He is the hardest working person I have ever known.

**Monongahela National Forest
Hiking Guide**

by Allen deHart & Bruce Sundquist

**Published by the
West Virginia**

Highlands Conservancy

The new 7th edition covers:

more than 200 trails for over 700 miles

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www.wvhighlands.org

BIG PLANS FOR FALL REVIEW

We have reserved the Cheat Mountain Club for one full week, October 23-30, 2003, and plan to organize a conference there for this period.

The week reserved is from Thursday to Thursday. The Fall Review would be Friday through Sunday, October 24 to 26, with the annual membership meeting and Board meeting being on Sunday, October 26.

Right now, the entire event is not yet planned. We hope to organize the Fall Review as well as the entire weekend around Wilderness, Forest Planning, Shavers Fork watershed/water quality issues with workshops, programs, speakers, outings, volunteer work, etc.

If we were the government and doing an Environmental Impact Statement, we would say we are in the “scoping” phase. Since we are not the government, we are free to speak English and say that we have reserved the space and have a general idea of what we want to do but don’t have the details worked out yet.

WHAT'S DOING AT THE LEGISLATURE

By Don Garvin, Legislative Coordinator, West Virginia Environmental Council

As I write this, there are only six days remaining in the 2003 session of the West Virginia legislature. At this point no new bills may be originated in either House or Senate. What a relief! However, attempts can still be made to amend new legislation into "germane" bills that have already passed one house or the other, so you never know what tomfoolery to expect.

This session got off to a more hectic start than usual, when after just nine days the House passed out its versions of four of the most controversial items on the Governor's agenda: medical malpractice "reform," higher education restructuring, the workers' compensation funding, and "safety" for all-terrain vehicles. After five more weeks of squabbling, only one of these issues has been resolved.

Here is a run-down on legislation of interest to WV Highlands Conservancy members:

ATV Regulation

West Virginia leads the nation in deaths to riders of all-terrain vehicles. West Virginia is one of only two states that don't have legislation regulating the safe operation of these machines. Health and children's safety advocates have tried for years to pass such legislation in Charleston, to no avail. Their attempt failed again this year.

The House passed its version of the ATV bill (HB 2121) early in the session. It was a really weak bill, with few real safety provisions and lots of exemptions. In addition, the House bill left it unclear as to where these vehicles could be driven (more on that later). The Senate then took up the bill, struck the House language and inserted its own. There were then two versions of the bill, with the Senate version being slightly stronger on safety provisions but just as vague on allowing these machines on public roads and highways.

The bill then went to a conference committee to reconcile the two versions. A compromise was reached (still weak and vague). The House passed the conference committee report. On Friday, Feb. 28, the Senate rejected the conference report, and instead moved a brand new version of the bill, which had been hatched in the Senate Judiciary Committee just the day before. However, this new version of the bill died when the Senate failed to waive the rule that the bill be read on three separate days.

So all-terrain vehicle regulation is dead for another year. All this led Conni Lewis, who lobbies for both CORL and WVEC, to remark, "When the legislative process is compared to sausage making, sometimes the sausage makers should sue for slander."

Complicating all this for environmentalists is a previous ruling by the Attorney General that says ATVs are NOT defined as motor vehicles under WV law, but then goes on to say that they do not meet mechanical and insurance requirements to be legal on state roads and highways. Currently, law enforcement agencies apparently believe there is a gray area regarding the legality of road use of these dangerous and destructive vehicles, so there is no attempt to keep them off the roads. This is frustrating and confusing to WV's State Parks managers and U.S. Forest Service personnel and others of us who want to keep ATVs out of public parks and forests.

Are they illegal on our roads and highways now? Once again the legislature has failed to clarify the situation.

Overweight Coal Trucks

Not satisfied with two legislative defeats on this issue last year, the coal industry is once again pushing for legalizing monster coal trucks. This time they may win.

SB 583 was passed by the Senate on Friday and would create designated coal haul routes in 16 southern counties where specially permitted trucks could legally run at weights of up to 126,000 pounds. The current weight limit is 80,000 pounds.

The bill contains a penny-per-ton surcharge that would go toward repairing road and bridge damage caused by the heavier trucks. At one cent a ton, Sen. Randy White, D-Webster, told the Senate, "It's only going to take us 1,000 years to upgrade our roads to 120,000-pound standards." Amendments offered both by Sen. White and Sen. Jon Hunter, D-Monongalia, to raise the surcharge up to a dollar per ton were defeated on a voice vote.

The bill now goes to the House, where passage seems likely given the new make-up of the House after last November's elections.

"No More Stringent" Coal Regulations

Midway in this session the WV Coal Association brought the legislature its proposal to roll back every coal industry environmental regulation unless the DEP could

prove that the regulation was "no more stringent than" federal law and OSM rules. The coal boys whined that their proposal was necessary because (they claim) it takes longer to get mining permits in West Virginia than in Kentucky!

Of course, the legislature listens to the coal boys, so two bills emerged. The bill in the House was never taken up, but the Senate Energy, Industry and Mining Committee seemed determined to pass their version of the bill (SB 480). But the industry proposal was so shameless that even the notoriously biased EIM Committee felt it reeked.

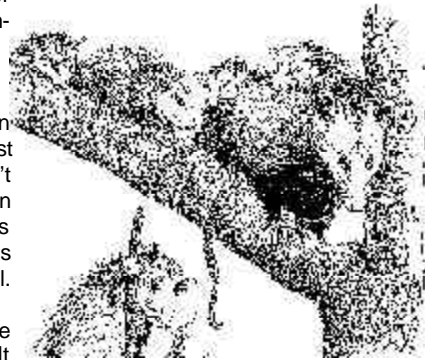
Instead, they passed a resolution that sets up an interim study that will require coal and DEP to develop and analyze a list of every regulation, policy, and procedure for variations between state and federal mining rules. Sen. Hunter offered an amendment in EIM to include representatives from WVEC in the study process. Committee chair Bill Sharpe (D-Lewis) chided that adding WVEC would make the process political (as if the coal industry were not the ultimate political animal)! The amendment failed. The resolution passed out of committee, and was then approved by the full Senate.

DEP believes this will give the agency the opportunity to debunk the claims of the industry. I believe this gives the coal boys exactly what they want – another whole year to chant their "no more stringent than" mantra to legislators and the media. So the next time there is a rule or regulation for the legislature to consider, the coal industry will have an army of delegates and senators shouting "no more stringent than" from the rooftop.

Water Quality Board Proposal Dies

HB 2717 was an attempt by the Dirty Water Coalition folks like the Farm Bureau and the Chamber of Commerce (remember

(Continued on p. 7)



(More About the Legislature)

antideg?) to get rid of the Environmental Quality Board's role in setting water quality standards. It would have replaced EQB with a new Water Quality Board headed by the Secretary of DEP and composed of various department heads appointed by the governor, such as Agriculture, Forestry, and Highways (just imagine Gus Douglas and Randy Dye deciding what our state's water quality standards should be).

Now the environmental community has been no great fan of the EQB over the years, but this new proposal was simply lu-

dicrously unacceptable. Thankfully, House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Amores (D-Kanawha) agreed. Even though the bill was adopted in the House Government Organization Committee, it was never taken up in Judiciary.

Water Quantity Protection

Two separate water protection actions were passed by the Senate and await the House next week. One action is a resolution, the other a statute.

SCR 27 is a resolution that estab-

lishes a yearlong, detailed study of water quantity policy in interims, supported by an independent technical/citizen task force that will meet monthly.

SB 650 — the Water Quantity Law — would be the first statute to directly protect West Virginia's water quantity in our state's 139-year history.

Well, that's my report for now. The WVEC lobby team wants to thank the WVHC board for its continuing financial support and assistance during the session.

SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS INITIATIVE: FINAL REPORT 2002 ON AIR QUALITY, IMPACTS AND CLEAN-UP

By Don Gasper

The Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative (SAMI) was a voluntary public-private regional partnership working to improve air quality. Eight Southeastern States lead SAMI. They are Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Other participants include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, industries, environmental organizations and interested citizens.

State Air Chiefs attended meetings four times per year for the 8 years of the study, for a number of years as many as 4 Governors were present yearly. For the last 5 years the W.Va. Highlands Conservancy has interacted on the Technical Oversight Committee and the Effects Sub-committee. The severe conditions found in Dolly Sods and Otter Creek, and federal law to protect them, set the necessary strong clean-up studied by SAMI in the southeast. This was due to great and prolonged acid deposition and a lack of buffering (low geological acid neutralizing capacity).

The SAMI Mission was to identify and recommend reasonable measures to remedy existing - and to prevent future -adverse effects from human-induced air pollution on the air quality related values of the Southern Appalachians, primarily, those of Class 1 parks and wilderness areas, weighing the environmental and socioeconomic implications of any recommendations.

In 1990 and 1992 the Department of the Interior published preliminary notices of adverse impacts for Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks respectively. These effects included:

- Reduced visibility, particularly in summer months
- Decline in spruce fir forest ecosystem
- Foliar injury to several wildflower, shrub, and tree species
- Increase acidity of streams and reduced stream habitat suitable for supporting trout.

SAMI was created in 1992 in response to these Federal Land Managers' concerns about permitting new emissions sources near Class 1 parks and wilderness areas in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. SAMI was established to examine the present and future effects of air pollution on these parks and wilderness areas. It was also to recommend ways to deal with any adverse effects that were found.

SAMI confirmed poor air quality and its adverse impacts. It suggested each state reduce its own sulfur and nitrogen emissions to levels below those planned in the Clean Air Act, and that the Federal Government assist the Ohio Valley States in planning regional reductions.

THE VALUE OF WILDERNESS

By Don Gasper

From the first our American spirit came from this new continent's immense wilderness. Our national character was forged in response to wilderness's challenge. We became courageous, rugged, and self-reliant, ingenious and curious and rugged individualists. These values shape our early history. Even among today's citizens there are those who test themselves by penetrating, for a time, today's limited wild areas. These relic wilderness areas are of enormous and growing value.

These are our links to the original forest and our past. The U.S.Forest Service calls them "ecological anchors in today's frag-

ile landscapes", "aquatic strongholds for trout", and ecological "reference areas for research". "A tap-root into the landscape of our beginnings, they fuel our imagination and ignite our spirit".

The designated Wilderness Areas (144 in the East - they are small) and our parks are the only places our country permanently protects from logging and most other extractive uses. Wildlife habitat is protected and allowed to develop and ecosystems are allowed to function naturally. Wilderness protects watersheds, recharges aquifers, filters pollutants dropped in from the air. We must clean up our air, because "if

we are to preserve wilderness, the air over our heads and water in our rivers must be as wild as the land beneath our feet." Wilderness areas are to be places where "the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man" and places "retaining its primeval character and influence."

That we will need more Wilderness is clear. The Monongahela National Forest affords us this timely opportunity. Our Public Lands Committee is actively involved in these advocacy for the forest. If you want to join in this work, contact chair Bob Marshall at the address listed on page 2.

**Help support the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
Canaan (balsam) Fir Conservation Project**

TREE SALE!

The Highlands Conservancy has obtained a limited quantity of Husky 12-15inch Canaan Fir trees specially grown for us from seed collected in Canaan Valley. These trees are not available anyplace else.

We are selling them to raise money for balsam fir conservation in West Virginia.

1 tree \$12

10 trees \$60

-Prices include shipping.

-Trees will be shipped in April.

-Orders filled on a first come-first served basis. Quantities are limited.

If you can't use any trees yourself, but would like to help in this effort, you can also buy trees to be planted on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, or simply make a donation.

Questions? Contact
send your order to:



Dave Saville at dave@wvhighlands.org or 304-284-9548.

West
Virginia
Highlands
Conservancy
PO Box 306

Charleston, WV 25321

**ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS SAY WIND POWER PROJECT VIOLATES
ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

The national environmental group Defenders of Wildlife and West Virginia's Friends of Blackwater have given legal notice that a proposed 200-turbine wind electric power project near the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area would violate the Endangered Species Act.

On Monday, February 3rd, the two groups sent a 60-day notice of intent to sue letter to Nedpower, a Dutch company that proposes to build a large-scale wind electric power project on the Allegheny Front in Grant County, West Virginia. The letter, which is a prerequisite for legal action under the Endangered Species Act, states that clearing of forests, road construction, and turbine and powerline installation on the 14-mile-long, 1-mile-wide project site would expose Nedpower to liability for "taking" an endangered species, the West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel.

The legal notice to Nedpower states that five endangered flying squirrels were found on the project site in October, the furthest north the species has been found. Defenders of Wildlife and Friends of Blackwater claim that the nocturnal squirrels, which are found only in the West Virginia and Virginia Highlands, depend on unique spruce and older hardwood forests for their habitat. The groups say that the Nedpower proposal would substantially degrade habitat for the squirrel, and cause their already fragile populations to decline.

"Wind power is supposed to be environmentally benign. But this hasty, ill-considered scheme, in the heart of some of West Virginia's most valuable scenic land and natural habitat, is not benign," said Judy Rodd of Friends of Blackwater. "Nedpower should have consulted with Fish and Wildlife immediately when the company found endangered species on the site. I guess it's up to citizens to make them obey the law," she said.

"Wind power will be part of our energy future, but we have to be smart about where and how we go about it. West Virginia

has already paid a high environmental price for this country's energy demands, so why on earth would we want to add a poorly thought-out wind power project to that toll?" said Caroline Kennedy, of Defenders of Wildlife.

The letter also cites threats to the endangered Virginia big-eared bat, which is found in a cave near the project, and to thousands of migratory birds that fly by the proposed power project area.

The legal notice states that the West Virginia Public Service Commission, which is reviewing a permit application from Nedpower, may also be liable under the Endangered Species Act, if the PSC permits the project without requiring Nedpower to get a permit from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The groups are being represented by Meyer & Glitzenstein, a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C.

Defenders of Wildlife is a nonprofit conservation organization with more than 430,000 members and supporters. For timely information on environmental issues, visit www.defenders.org and subscribe to DENLines, a free e-mail alert newsletter. Friends of Blackwater advocates for the protection of the special places and special creatures of the West Virginia Highlands. Learn more at www.saveblackwater.org.

Virginia Big-Eared Bats



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We are now offering a wonderful incentive for new membership applications we receive. We have had beautiful books donated to us, including two National Geographic books. Join now, using the form below, to get your free gift.

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

DUES GOING UP

By Dave Saville

In 1982, the Highlands Conservancy set the membership dues structure that has been in effect for the past 20 years. Senior and Student dues have been \$12, Individual regular \$15, Family Regular \$25. The Board of Directors has talked about of raising dues several times in recent years. In January, the Board decided it was finally time, and set a new dues structure at a still modest \$15, \$25 & \$35 levels.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) was at 190 in November 2002, relative to 100 in 1982. So the price of everything has roughly doubled, or a dollar is worth roughly half as much today as it was in 1982. More precisely, if you wanted to make WVHC dues the same in real dollars today as they were in 1982, you would raise them to \$22.80, \$28.50, and \$47.50. Or, to put it another way, in 1982 dollars the proposed new dues, \$15, \$25, and \$35 would be \$7.89, \$13.16, and \$18.42. Even less than what the old dues structure was.

All this goes to show that our dues aren't really increasing, but are actually going down! (I should be a politician) In all seriousness, we don't need to explain to you, our members, about inflation and it's effects on costs, especially over a 20-year period. The cost of publishing, printing and mailing the *Highlands Voice*, and administering our growing membership has been going up continually. Assuming they mirror the increase

in the Consumer Price Index, they have doubled. In the same time, the value of our membership dues has been cut in half. While we do not want anyone to not be a member because they cannot afford it, we have to generate enough revenue from our membership dues to cover basic operational costs.

Much of the debate over raising the membership dues at our January Board meeting centered around creating a new category of membership. The idea is to have a lower level of dues, besides the senior and student level, for anyone who was uncomfortable with the new dues levels. Basically, if someone wants to be a member and receive the *Highlands Voice*, we want you to. If you are uncomfortable with our regular membership rate of \$25, we now have a new category called "introductory/other" where you can get a membership still at our old rate of \$15.

We are even going one step further to help ensure that everyone who wants to, can afford to be a member. In this issue of the *Highlands Voice*, you will find a special insert. This insert is a one-time only ticket to join, or renew your membership, at the old dues rate. This will be your last chance to pay \$6.31 (in 1982 dollars) to be a Highlands Conservancy member.

STILL FIGHTING

By Ken Ward

Despite another loss in federal court, Southern West Virginia residents are expected to continue their fight against mountaintop removal coal mining into 2003 and beyond.

In late January, a federal appeals court threw out U.S. District Judge Charles H. Haden II's second effort to strictly limit mountaintop removal. The ruling was a major win for the coal industry, and for the Bush administration, which changed federal rules to legalize the burying of streams with mining's valley fill waste piles.

In its ruling, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond overturned an injunction, issued by Haden in May 2002, that blocked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from authorizing valley fills not proposed as part of post-mining land development plans.

But in writing for the court majority, Judge Paul V. Niemeyer made one thing clear: The 4th Circuit decision does not decide the broader questions about mountaintop removal. "It does not present the question of whether mountaintop removal coal mining is useful, desirable or wise," Niemeyer wrote.

In mountaintop removal, coal companies blast off entire hilltops to uncover valuable low-sulfur coal reserves. Left-over rock and dirt — the stuff that used to be the mountains — is shoved into nearby valleys, burying streams.

A part of a broad study of the practice, federal agencies found that, between 1985 and 1999, mountaintop removal buried at least 562 miles of Appalachian streams. In drafts of the study, government experts found that, without tougher regulations, mountaintop removal will eventually destroy 350 square miles of Appalachian streams.

Nearly two-thirds of West Virginia's coal production still comes from underground mining. But in the state's southern coalfields, many major operators favor mountaintop removal to extract the region's vast low-sulfur coal seams.

Since 1991, underground coal production in the state has decreased by an average of 2.2 percent per year. Surface mine production has increased by an average of 2.6 percent per year. In a recent report, the U.S. Office of Surface Mining found that 81 percent of the state's surface mine production came from mountaintop removal operations.

"Mountaintop mining operations are largely responsible for the increased surface coal production," OSM said.

In West Virginia, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition have aggressively fought mountaintop removal. But the latest

court rulings involved a lawsuit filed by a Kentucky group, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, or KFTC. In August 2001, lawyers for KFTC sought to block a mining application that would bury more than 6 miles of streams in Martin County, Ky.

Essentially, the group argued that valley fills are waste material, and that the corps' own Clean Water Act regulations did not allow the agency to permit waste disposal

was wrong.

Coal industry officials celebrated the 4th Circuit ruling. "The livelihoods of thousands of hard-working people throughout Central Appalachia have been safeguarded by today's decision, and millions of homes and businesses that rely on coal-based electricity are once again assured of reliable and affordable energy," said National Mining Association President Jack Gerard.

Environmentalists criticized the decision, and said that the would continue their fight. "While the judges and lawyers argue the technicalities and interpretations of the law, strip mining is destroying our mountains and streams and taking away a future for our children," said Patty Wallace, a member of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

"We are disappointed but not terribly surprised given the conservative court. Certainly it's a setback — the kind of setback that we have seen in numerous environmental decisions of the Bush administration," said David Rouse, a Kentuckians For the Commonwealth member and Harlan County, Ky., resident.

Citizen groups are likely to advance a number of efforts to

continue to try to limit or ban mountaintop removal. On Feb. 12, legislation was reintroduced in the House of Representatives to write Haden's ruling into federal law. The bill was sponsored by Reps. Frank Pallone Jr, D-N.J., and Christopher Shays, R-Conn.

"Our bipartisan legislation is needed to ensure our streams and waterways aren't buried under millions of tons of mining and other industrial wastes," Pallone said. "While the legal debate continues, it is critical that we support the true intentions of the Clean Water Act and oppose the continued efforts of the Bush administration to use our nation's waterways as dumping grounds for industrial wastes."

OSM Director Jeff Jarrett, a former coal operator, has warned the industry that the 4th Circuit's decision to overturn Haden won't be the end of the mountaintop removal battle.

"We need to focus not just on winning the lawsuits," Jarrett said. "We need to take a very honest look at the problems. I think the citizens filed the lawsuits out of desperation, because they had frustrated all of their efforts to talk to industry or the government about their concerns," Jarrett said. "If we don't resolve the underlying issues, the uncertainty will continue."

This story originally appeared in The Charleston Gazette.



Federal regulations have rewritten environmental rules to legalize valley fills like this one under construction near Cabin Creek in Eastern Rappahannock County.

der so-called "dredge-and-fill" permits. When it passed the Clean Water Act, Congress gave the Corps authority under Section 404 of the law to issue permits "for the discharge of dredged or fill material" into rivers and streams. Authority to permit discharges of other types of pollutants was given to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 402.

Congress didn't define "fill material." In its own definition, the corps excluded any material that was deposited into streams mainly as a way to dispose of waste. Faced with a court challenge to new valley fill permits, the Bush administration revised a Clinton-era plan. In May 2002, the corps and EPA rewrote their regulations to specifically allow fills under Section 402.

In his ruling, Haden said that the agencies' new rulemaking didn't matter. Most valley fills, the judge said, were prohibited by the Clean Water Act itself.

Haden said that valley fills could only be permitted if they were proposed with a constructive primary purpose. The judge likened that test to the requirement that strip mines that don't restore mined land to its "approximate original contour," or AOC, must propose post-mining land development plans.

In its Jan. 29 ruling, the 4th Circuit said that Haden was wrong. The appeals court said Haden wrongly failed to defer to the corps' own interpretation of the Clean Water Act. The appeals court also said that Haden's interpretation — which he substituted for the corps' —

VIRGINIA BIG-EARED BAT
(*Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus*)

Status:

This bat, a subspecies of Townsend's big-eared bat, is listed as federally endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The total population is probably less than 20,000 individuals.

West Virginia Status:

More Virginia big-eared bats occur in West Virginia than in any other state. Caves are very important for this bat, and most of the significant caves are protected in some way. As a result, populations in the state are increasing. Populations in some caves have increased as much as 350% from 1983 to 1995.

Description:

The Virginia big-eared bat is a moderate-sized bat weighing 9-12 grams (the common little brown myotis weighs around 6 grams). The fur is brown, and the underparts are buff-colored. The large ears are over 2.5 centimeters (1 inch) in length. There are two prominent lumps on the nose. The hairs on the toes do not extend much beyond the ends of the toes. The only bat it can be confused with is Rafinesque's big-eared bat, but this bat has white belly fur and long toe hairs.

Range:

There are five recognized subspecies of Townsend's big-eared bat. Two of these subspecies occur in the western United States, and one subspecies is found in Mexico. Another subspecies is found in the karst region (an area characterized by limestone and associated sinkholes and caves) of the Ozark Mountains. The fifth subspecies, the Virginia big-eared bat, occurs in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Populations exist in Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Habitat:

Caves are used by Virginia big-eared bats in both winter and summer. During the winter, these bats hibernate in caves that provide cold, but above freezing, temperatures. Most of the world's Virginia big-eared bats hibernate in just three caves. One cave in West Virginia harbors over 6350 hibernating Virginia big-eared bats, the largest concentration of these bats anywhere. Female Virginia big-eared bats form maternity colonies in caves where they rear their young. Warm caves are most suitable for maternity colonies, but a few maternity colonies occur in cold caves. In these caves, the colony gathers in small domes in the cave ceiling where their body heat is trapped, creating a pocket of warm air.

Virginia big-eared bats forage in a variety of habitats including old fields, hay fields, and forested areas. Radio-telemetry studies in West Virginia have shown that these bats travel up to 10.5 kilometers (6.5 miles) from the cave roost to feed. Individual bats often return to the same feeding area night after night.

Diet:

Like all bats in West Virginia, the Virginia big-eared bat feeds exclusively on insects. Small moths make up the largest part of this bat's diet.

Life History:

Mating takes place in the fall and winter, but the sperm is stored and the ova is not fertilized until the next spring. Pregnant females start to appear in the maternity colony as early as mid-March, but most do not arrive until later. The number of bats in maternity colonies in West Virginia ranges from 120 to 1350 bats (based on 1995 data). The gestation period for this species varies from 56 to 100 days depending on the ambient (outside) temperature (the young develop quicker during warm springs).

In West Virginia, most young are born in June. Each female has a single young, known as a "pup." The pups are quite large and may weigh as much as 25% of the mother's weight. The young are capable of flight by the time they are three weeks old; by six weeks of age they are weaned. The location of most males during the summer is not known, but a few "bachelor" colonies have been found.

Virginia big-eared bats do not leave their cave roost until quite late in the evening. For this reason, they are rarely seen as they forage. During the night the bats punctuate feeding bouts with periods of inactivity when they digest their food. During these periods of rest, the bats often roost near their foraging areas. They have been observed night-roosting in old sheds, in trees, under bridges, and even in an old chicken coop. These bats do travel long distances; the largest movement recorded is around 57 kilometers (40 miles). The oldest known Townsend's big-eared bat on record was 16 years 5 months in age.

In the autumn, the bats put on fat to get them through the winter when the insects they fed on are not available. Some bats begin to return to the hibernation site in September, but they still continue to feed each warm evening. By December, the bats have entered hibernation. During hibernation the bats form dense clusters on the cave ceiling.

Threats and Prospects:

The number of Virginia big-eared bats declined sharply from the 1950's to the early 1980's. Most of the decline has been attributed to human disturbance of these animals in their cave roosts. During winter, these bats are more sensitive than most bats to disturbance, and they are easily awakened from hibernation. Because the bats must survive the winter on a limited amount of stored fat, each arousal uses up some of the fat reserve the bats need to survive. If they are disturbed repeatedly throughout the winter, they starve to death before spring arrives. In the summer, disturbance of maternity colonies causes the females to panic. Young dropped to the cave floor may not be recovered, and the bats may abandon the site altogether. Although pesticides have impacted other bat species, they do not seem to have played a significant role in the decline of this species. Fortunately, Virginia big-eared bat numbers have increased since the early 1980's. This is the result of the protection of cave roosts. Critical caves are closed to human travel during the time when the bats are using the cave. Gates and fences have been built a some cave entrances.

WEST VIRGINIA NORTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL
(*Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*)

Status:

Although northern flying squirrel populations are stable throughout much of the species' range, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially listed the two southern Appalachian subspecies as "Endangered" in 1985. One subspecies is found in West Virginia and an adjacent county of Virginia; the other subspecies occurs in North Carolina, Tennessee, and extreme southwestern Virginia.

West Virginia Status:

The subspecies which occurs in West Virginia was first described in 1936 based on a specimen captured in the vicinity of Cranberry Glades, Pocahontas County. In West Virginia, the northern flying squirrel is now known from 84 sites in higher elevations.

Description:

The northern flying squirrel is a small, nocturnal mammal weighing 90-148 grams (3.2-5.2 ounces) and measuring 260-305 millimeters (10.25 to 12.0 inches) in total length (tip of nose to tip of the last tail bone). It has a long, broad, flattened tail, very large, dark eyes, and thick, silky fur. The fur is light brown to reddish brown in color while the belly fur is mostly white. The distinctive patagia (pa-TEH-jee-ah) (folds of skin between the ankles and wrists) and the broad tail allow the squirrel to glide from tree to tree; bats are the only mammals that can truly fly.

There are two species of flying squirrels found in West Virginia, the northern flying squirrel and the southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*). The endangered northern flying squirrel can be distinguished from the common southern flying squirrel by its larger size and greater adult weight (90-148 grams (northern) vs. 50-90 grams (southern)), the dark tip of its tail, and belly hairs which are gray at the base and white at the tip as opposed to the entirely white hairs of the southern flying squirrel. The coloration of the northern flying squirrel is "richer" than the relatively dull and paler southern flying squirrel.

Range:

Northern flying squirrels occur in boreal evergreen and mixed northern hardwood/evergreen forests of the northern United States and Canada, the mountain ranges in the western United States, and certain high elevation areas of the Appalachian Mountains. The subspecies found in West Virginia, *G. s. fuscus*, occurs in only 6 counties in West Virginia (Greenbrier, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Randolph, Tucker, and Webster) and Highland County, Virginia. West Virginia locations for this species are in areas above 872 m (2860 ft) in elevation.

Habitat:

As its name implies, the northern flying squirrel is typically found in boreal habitats, especially spruce/fir/hemlock and northern hardwood forests. In West Virginia, this squirrel is usually associated with red spruce and northern hardwoods such as sugar maple, black cherry, American beech, black birch, and yellow birch. These habitat types are most common in areas over 909 meters (3000 feet) in elevation. Most known occurrences of the northern flying squirrel are in moist forests with at least some mature trees, standing snags, and downed logs; lichens and mosses are often abundant. In the southern Appalachians, northern flying squirrels tend to occupy small and potentially vulnerable islands of high elevation habitat.

Diet:

Northern flying squirrels feed on a variety of foods including lichens, fungi (both epigeous fungi (fungi which fruit aboveground) and hypogeous fungi (fungi which fruit underground)), seeds, buds, fruits, staminate cones (male cones containing pollen such as the male cones of the red spruce), nuts, insects, and other plant and animal materials.

Life History:

Northern flying squirrels probably mate when one year old. The gestation period runs from 37 to 42 days. Females typically have one, or possibly two, litters of 1-6 young per year. The young are born blind and furless. The females nurse their young for approximately 2 months; the males have very little to do with rearing the young. Northern flying squirrels are active the entire year. Winter nests are usually in tree cavities and woodpecker holes or dense branches in the tops of evergreen trees; in summer the squirrels may also construct outside leaf nests which are often built in the upper portions of spruce trees.

Threats and Prospects:

The northern flying squirrel has been protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1985. The main threat to this animal is loss of habitat (high elevation red spruce forest) to timbering and development. As a result of extensive logging, there is less red spruce forest in West Virginia today than there was before the timber boom around the turn of the last century. However, many areas in the higher elevations are coming back as red spruce forest, although it will be many years before much of this forest is mature and suitable northern flying squirrel habitat. There is also some concern that the more common southern flying squirrel may be displacing the northern flying squirrel in some areas. Some types of habitat changes may favor the southern flying squirrel over the northern. Recent surveys, conducted through the placement and monitoring of nest boxes or by live-trapping, have shown the northern flying squirrel to be more widespread and abundant than was thought in 1985. When the subspecies was listed, there were only 10 documented captures of this squirrel in West Virginia. By the middle of 1996, there were 779 recorded captures at 84 sites in the state. Most of the known locations of this squirrel are within the Monongahela National Forest and are protected. Under the present Forest Management Plan, all habitat within 0.83 kilometers (0.5 mile) of a northern flying squirrel capture site is protected. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is reviewing the status of this subspecies to determine if it should be "downlisted" from endangered to threatened status based on the results of recent surveys and protection efforts.

NATIONAL FOREST ROADS

By Dave ASaville

How many are there?

Over 440,000 miles of roads cut through our National Forests. To put this number into perspective, it would circle the equator 17 times, and is nearly 10 times the U.S. interstate highway system.

What do so many forest roads cost the taxpayer?

Roads are an economic drain on US taxpayers. In 1996 alone, \$95 million was appropriated to the Forest Service for the construction and reconstruction of wildland roads. An additional \$81 million was appropriated for road maintenance. From 1985 to 1996 \$1.9 billion was appropriated to the Forest Service solely for forest road construction and reconstruction, though funding has decreased significantly in the past few years. \$938 million was appropriated for road maintenance during the same time period. These figures do not consider money spent by the federal government to mitigate the ecological impacts of roads and to clean up the messes when wildland roads blow out, pouring thousands of tons of sediment into rivers and streams.

What do forest roads do to wildland ecosystems?

Roads and road building wreak havoc on U.S. public wildlands by fragmenting wildlife habitat; introducing exotic pests and pathogens; increasing stream sedimentation; accelerating erosion; increasing wildlife mortality; and increasing access for logging, mining, poaching and off-road vehicle abuse.

Forest roads continually fail, destroying aquatic and terrestrial habitat. In addition, rural communities that live down slope from excessive forest roads and logging are often victims to road-related landslides and flooding. Roads contribute up to 90% of the sedimentation to streams through low and high impact erosion. Much of the recent flooding is tied to excessive road building and logging. Many of these road failures and blow-outs could have been avoided had the roads never been built, or if they had been effectively removed after use.

What can we do about forest roads?

The Forest Service receives Congressional appropriations for road construction/reconstruction, maintenance and obliteration. In the past ten years, the US Government has handed out nearly \$2 billion for forest road construction. In that same time period only \$5 million was specifically allocated to road obliteration, and that entire sum came in 1991. In addition, over \$42 million has been spent for emergency repairs under the Federal Highway Administration's Emergency Relief for Federally Owned (ERFO) program. Additional money has been spent by the U.S. government to clean up the mess after the roads fail and communities are flooded with chocolate brown water filled with sediments and swelling out of river beds into homes and businesses. Generally speaking, it costs between \$20-\$60 to remove a cubic yard (cy) of sediment once it is in a stream, whereas it costs between \$2-\$8 to prevent that same sediment from reaching streams by decommissioning roads.

Continuing to appropriate money for forest road construction will only exacerbate the problem. The American public would benefit economically and environmentally if funding were moved from forest road construction/reconstruction to forest road decommissioning/obliteration projects.

What is forest road removal and how does it work?

Allowing roads to revegetate naturally can lead to massive erosion problems as culverts get blocked/plugged and erosive soils give way. Decommissioning roads uses the same heavy equipment and skills as road construction to prevent roads from blowing out or failing by restoring natural contours and hydrologic flows to the land. If heavy equipment was used to build the road, it is usually going to be needed to effectively remove the problems roads can cause. In the end, stream crossings are completely removed, returning streams to their original courses, road beds are ripped and loosened so plants can grow again, and the original contour of the area is returned.

Who benefits from road removal and how?

Local workers, U.S. taxpayers and terrestrial and aquatic wildlife all benefit from road removal. Local workers get high-paying jobs restoring public lands. U.S. taxpayers get huge savings to their wallets as road subsidies are cut, sediment sources are removed, mitigation costs are reduced or removed and the land is restored, increasing its overall value and its potential to produce resources. Wildlife obviously benefit as habitat and connecting corridors are restored and streams run clear and clean again. This also benefits recreation dependent on healthy ecosystems.

This information was collected from the Wildlands Center for Preventing Roads website at www.wildlandscrp.org

Government Lawyers Have to Edit First

MOUNTAINTOP REVIEW STUDY DELAYED AGAIN

Federal regulators have again delayed the release of a major study of the environmental impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining. U.S. Office of Surface Mining officials said that they are now aiming to issue a formal draft of the study sometime in April. In January, OSM Director Jeff Jarrett had said that the report would be posted on the Internet by late February.

In late February, OSM spokesman Mike Gauldin said final editing of the draft report is taking longer than Jarrett had hoped. "The good news is they are done with the writing stage and they are now in the editing stage," Gauldin said. "It's going to take several more weeks to finish the editing."

Gauldin declined to put a date on the expected release of the draft. But other OSM officials said the schedule calls for posting on the Internet during the first week of April. A formal

public comment period would not start until printed copies of the report are released, officials said.

Under a 1998 court settlement, the massive Environmental Impact Statement, or EIS, was due by December 2000. The court settlement that required the study was reached to resolve part of a lawsuit filed by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy to try to curb mountaintop removal. To avoid further litigation, federal regulators agreed to study the practice, and propose new rules to more strictly police it.

Officially, no draft of the study has been made public. But in May 2002, the Gazette obtained a draft under the Freedom of Information Act, and posted it on the newspaper's Web site at <http://wvgazette.com/eis>.

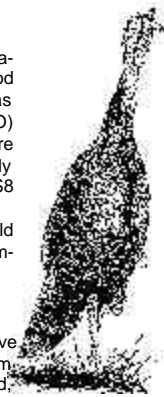
In general, the draft — prepared while

the Clinton administration was still running federal agencies — confirmed that mountaintop removal was devastating forests and streams in the Appalachian region. The draft said that coal industry officials have overstated the potential economic effects of tougher regulations.

Gauldin said in late February that federal government lawyers are doing final editing on the report.

"They are trying as hard as they can to get it done so we can start the public review and public comment process," Gauldin said. "They're busting it to try to get it done, but they've got hundreds of pages to go through, and lots of changes to make."

Information for this story originally appeared in The Charleston Gazette.



Six million tons all dug up and no place to go

Corridor H Waste Much Worse Than Predicted

By Hugh Rogers

The West Virginia Department of Transportation grossly underestimated the amount of rock and dirt left over to be disposed of on the Elkins to Kerens section of Corridor H, which opened last summer. The waste from excavation turned out to be nearly two and a half times as much as predicted in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). As a result, its estimates of environmental impacts such as habitat loss, stream and floodplain impairment, and visual effects, were inadequate and misleading.

Corridor H Alternatives requested the figures on excess excavation as it prepared to file comments on the Supplemental FEIS for the adjacent project from Kerens to Parsons. The figures were compared with the 1996 FEIS Mitigation Document.

The estimate in the Mitigation Document was supposed to be much more accurate than previous figures. To satisfy the resource agencies, especially EPA and the Fish

and Wildlife Service, which had expressed concern about waste on the entire 100-mile corridor, WVDOT had done preliminary design work on certain sections—including Elkins to Kerens, then known as Section 16. The earlier estimate had been raised by 43%, from 2,708,448 cubic meters to **3,882,265 cm**. When construction was completed, the actual figure was **9,406,240 cm**.

As WVDOT plans to extend Corridor H through the Monongahela National Forest, its waste estimates have become a major issue for the Highlands Conservancy. Our three-year-old settlement agreement called for a new alignment to avoid the Corricks Ford Battlefield, Shavers Fork River, and Otter Creek Wilderness. The Supplemental FEIS for the Kerens to Parsons project purports to compare the damage from four possible alignments, and claims to choose the least bad alternative. But what if the actual disturbance footprint would be twice as large?

Corridor H Alternatives and the Highlands Conservancy have reported the excess waste figures to the federal and state natural resource agencies, as well as the Federal Highway Administration, and asked these questions: How can you approve an alternative if you can't predict the size of the project? How will you assure that WVDOT doesn't get it wrong again? How will you limit the waste disposal problem on the next section?

We have insisted that excess excavation be limited to the absolute minimum, that construction access roads be tightly restricted, and that waste be deposited outside the National Forest on sites leased or bought from willing property owners. If Corridor H is ever built in the highlands east of Elkins, the responsible agencies will have to do a better job of monitoring and enforcing their mitigation agreements with WVDOT.

GREETINGS FROM THE NEW WILDERNESS CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR

As I'm sure many of you read in the February issue of *The Highlands Voice*, the Wilderness Campaign Committee, comprised of folks from the Highlands Conservancy, Sierra Club and Wilderness Society, has recently hired a new coordinator. I feel honored to have been offered that position and was very excited to accept it. I'd like to take a little bit of space to say hello to everyone and to tell you a bit about myself.

In 1958, my grandfather picked up his family and moved to Ohio from the Buckhannon area. My dad was about 10 years old. Times were tough in the mines and he wanted to try and provide a better life for his family than he had growing up. I was raised in Northeastern Ohio, hearing tales of the majestic mountains and beautiful rivers of wild and wonderful West Virginia. I was fortunate enough to be taken on many trips throughout the state as a child to visit the mountains and my relatives that still live here today.

As a college student at Ohio University, I took every opportunity to get back to the Mountain State to climb at the New River Gorge and Seneca Rocks, paddle the Cheat and its many tributaries and of course, explore its spectacular wild places. After living out west for three years and attending graduate school at the University of Wyoming, my wife Julie and I had a chance to move here. Coming back to a state where I felt I had deep roots was an easy choice. Clearly, West Virginia has always been in my blood.

I have now been given a chance to work full time towards the permanent protection of some of West Virginia's most outstanding

wild places. I feel honored and privileged to be able to take on this important endeavor. During my first week on the job, I have felt a bit overwhelmed at times, trying to absorb all of the information that will be crucial in conducting a successful campaign. However, as the week progressed and I started meeting and getting to know a few of the folks that will be supporting this campaign, I have grown more confident.



The dedication, knowledge and passion of these activists is truly amazing and makes me think we will do nothing but succeed. Before I was even hired, much of the groundwork for a successful campaign was laid by these individuals. Even with this in mind, it will be an enormous task that will require the support and assistance of everyone who cares about wild places in West Virginia. It is a unique opportunity to mount an *offensive* campaign, and work to achieve what many of us want so much: more permanently protected Wilderness on the Mon! I look forward to meeting everyone and working with you to make our Wilderness Campaign a success. Please contact me if you have an interest in getting involved or would like more information.

Matt Keller
WV Wilderness Campaign Coordinator
(304)296-4118
mpaulkeller@yahoo.com

GOOD STUFF FOR FREE

To get a free **1 x Mountains bumper sticker(s)**, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Julian Martin, 1525 Hampton Rd., Charleston, WV 25314

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 (Ken-

tucky), 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, 1525 Hampton Road, Charleston, WV 25314.

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 or 304-342-8989.

West Virginia Mountain Odyssey



Outings, Education and Beyond

March 3, Mon. Snow shoe trek at White Grass. Looking for a unique way to celebrate 03/03/03? How about trying out snowshoeing in the Dolly Sods/Canaan Valley area. This will be a day outing only, covering about 7-10 miles, weather permitting. www.whitegrass.com Contact Susan Bly at sbly@shepherd.edu or 304-258-3319 between 7:00 and 9:00 pm.

April 12-13, Sat.-Sun. Otter Creek Spring Backpack. Plan to hike over Shaver's Mountain, admire the big hemlocks and the views, and camp on Otter Creek. Contact Peter Shoenfeld, peter@mountain.net, (301)587-6197.

May 17, Sat. Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Boardwalk/ bridge/trail construction. We will be helping the Friends of the 500th in providing an accessible trail to some wetlands and beaver ponds on the Freeland Tract. This is a volunteer work outing, come dressed for the weather, bring gloves tools etc. All welcome. For more information, contact Dave Saville 304-284-9548 dave@wvhighlands.org

May 31 - June 1, Sat.-Sun. Bushwhack Extreme On North Fork Mountain. Two day backpack trip up then down the steep west slope of North Fork Mountain. Enjoy thousands of vertical feet cascading streams and cliffs in very rugged and remote country. Spectacular views. This is a good chance to explore remote areas of a potential future Wilderness area. No trails. Experienced backpackers who are sure of foot and in good shape, only please. Hosted by Jonathan Jessup. (703)204-1372 jonathanjessup@hotmail.com

June 7, Sat. Ramsay's Draft, VA. Hike this unlogged stream from about noon to 4. About 6 mi., not steep. Meet at Marlinton's River Restaurant at the Bridge at 10 AM, Call Don Gasper, (304)472-3704.

June 7-10, Sat.-Tues. Backpacking, base-camping and hiking on Red Creek/ Roaring/ Flatrock Plains--one of the highest, most rugged, and most scenic parts of the West Va. Highlands and Monongahela National Forest. Near the peak of spring colors (azaleas, pink ladyslipper orchids). We will camp on, and explore, the rims of Allegheny Front and Long Run that offer some of the best views (and scenery) in the area - much of it rarely seen. Hopefully we will have time to visit Haystack Knob, Thunderstruck Rock, Mt. Porte Crayon and much of the north Rim of Long Run. Prior backpacking experience required. 16 miles of backpacking. Limit: 10. Contact Bruce Sundquist, 724-327-8737 or bsundquist1@juno.com

June 20-22, Fri.-Mon. Spruce Knob Bushwhacking/Backpack Trip. Ever wondered what lay beyond the trail's end? Or how about the "abandoned trail" listing on an older map? Come find out as we bushwhack through spruce and laurel, trying to find our own hidden Shangri-La. Strenuous. Contact Susan Bly at sbly@shepherd.edu or 304-258-3319 between 7:00 and 9:00 pm.

June 21. Canoeing. A flat-water float trip through the 5 mi. long Buickhannon River pool. We may fish; we will paddle. Meet at 11 AM at Sheetz at Corridor H in Buckhannon. Call Don Gasper at (304)472-3704.

June 28-29, Sat.-Sun. - Mountain Laurels Bloom Hikes in Bear Rocks and Dolly Sods Scenic area. Join for one or both days (with camping) to hike in countless acres of open meadows full of flowering mountain laurels. Spectacular mountain views and cool temperatures make for a nice summer escape in West Virginia's best alpine-like country. Hosted by Jonathan Jessup. (703)204-1372 jonathanjessup@hotmail.com

July 4-6, Fri.-Sun. - Roaring Plains - Canyons Rim Trail. Explore and witness spectacular, remote, rocky and rarely visited high elevation country. Many excellent views. Be prepared for cool temps and weather extremes. Despite high elevation, climbs are gradual. ~23 miles. Experienced backpackers only please. See photos at <http://www.jonathanjessup.com/rp-set1.html> Hosted by Jonathan Jessup. (703)204-1372 jonathanjessup@hotmail.com

August 8 - 10, Fri.-Sun. Dolly Sods Waterways. Looking for a way to cool off this summer? How about dowsing your head under a waterfall in one of WV's premier hiking destinations? Help find swimming holes in Red Creek as we backpack both in and out of the Creek. This trip is moderate to strenuous. Contact Susan Bly at sbly@shepherd.edu or 304-258-3319 between 7:00 and 9:00 pm.

October 4th, Sat. - Roaring Plains - Canyons Rim Trail Day Hike. Explore and witness spectacular, remote, rocky and rarely visited high elevation country. Many excellent views. Be prepared for cool temps and weather extremes. Only one 400ft climb. ~5 miles See photos at <http://www.jonathanjessup.com/rp-set1.html> Hosted by Jonathan Jessup. (703)204-1372 jonathanjessup@hotmail.com

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.

EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT ROARING PLAINS

By Jonathan Jessup

Are you someone who has interest in the Roaring/Flatrock/Red Creek plains area? An Internet discussion group focusing on this area has been formed and I invite you to join. The Roaring Plains area is at a crossroads and public attention needs to be brought to this unique high mountain plateau area in West Virginia – the highest plateau in the state and perhaps the highest plateau along entire east coast. Three separate potential wilderness designated areas exist, that total about 12,000 acres. The area is a great West Virginia treasure consisting of a lot of remote country with several ridges and mountaintops over 4,500 feet – among the highest and most dramatic in the state.

To quote Bruce Sundquist, co-author of the Highlands Conservancy's MNF Hiking Guide, "My view was once that greater public attention needed to be focused on Dolly Sods, Otter Creek and the Cranberry. I no longer believe that. My view is now that greater public attention needs to be focused on the Plains." A few reasons for this needed attention include USFS logging and road construction interests, windmill farm developments, pipeline expansions, and the possibility of additional transmitter tower developments.

The Roaring Plains area offers much to the nature and outdoor enthusiast. Topics of discussion have already included: exploring; hiking; bushwhacking; backpack outings; nature appreciation; USFS issues; protecting; history; geology; wetland bogs; mapping; etc.

Features that make the Plains area interesting include:

Mountain tops: a wild and remote feel, weather extremes that often include high winds and deep snow, seven known high elevation bogs, rocky terrain that include rock barrens, dense spruce forests that are recovering from destructive logging, extensive rhododendron and mountain laurel thickets, yellow birch and other hardwood forests, several cliff areas that collectively extend for miles, tannic creeks, remote non-documented trails and much more.

Mountain slopes: rugged and varied topography; cascading streams that descend for thousands of feet; dense hardwood forests; old growth hemlock in Roaring Creek Canyon and Long

Run Canyon; many miles of railroad grades – many of which are not on present maps; pastureland (cows) and fossils among many other things.

This list is also for Red Creek Plains, Haystack Knob, Green Knob, Smith Mountain and Mt Porte Crayon area. Long Run Canyon, Flatrock Run and other drainages around the Plains area are on topic in this discussion list.

More specifically the geographical area this discussion list is to focus on is bordered by the following landmarks:

FR 19 on the north east side, Rt. 55/28 on the east, Rt. 33 on the south side and Route 32 on the west side. Also, Bonner Mt. Road that connects Dry Fork and Laneville is the north-west border, west of FR 19.

Mary Ann Honcharik, one of the most enthusiastic list members, summarizes the appeal of the Plains well: "This is one of the reasons I love this area. You have nature, history, opportunities to enjoy on & off trail challenging adventures & you will never explore or know all of it."

To join the listserv, you must send a blank e-mail to this address: RoaringPlains-subscribe@yahoo.com

If you have any questions please contact me at jonathanjessup@hotmail.com or 703-204-1372

Thank you for your interest!

Editor's note: One of the limitations of the Voice is that we can't print pictures in color. Although I have never seen it that way, the picture that illustrates this story will probably be pretty good in black and white. In color it is better. One of the charms of Roaring Plains is the weather, with mist often shrouding it and different weather blowing in and out. The misty ones are particularly poorly suited to reproducing in black and white. If you really want to know what it looks like (short of going there) visit www.jonathanjessup.com which has pictures of this and a host of other interesting places.

The broad and flat plateau of the Roaring Plains, WV. This is about 3100 feet above the Potomac River below. That's more than the combined height of two Sears Tower buildings. The vegetation up here battles a harsh climate including about 180 inches of snow (average) a year. Photo copyright by Jonathan Jessup.



MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST CONDUCTS ROADS ANALYSIS

by Dave Saville, with the help of Susan Andrew and The Wilderness Society

In response to national direction developed in 2001 under Forest Service Chief Michael Dombeck, the Monongahela National Forest (Mon) prepared a Roads Analysis. Most Forests have a grossly inadequate inventory of existing roads, severely compromising their ability to identify and address the roads impacts to aquatic ecosystems.

This report presents a lot of helpful information about the forest. There are some big results, as well: for instance, it appears that nearly 200 miles of roads are at moderate to severe risk of slippage or failure, and the analysis only considers the larger roads! Unfortunately, there are some key elements promised under the policy that are not presented. To give just two examples: 1) only currently mapped roads, the larger roads classified as levels 3-5, are considered in the analysis, and the road inventory is old, dating back to 1986. 2) Many perennial streams, and *all* intermittent and ephemeral streams, are absent from the stream inventory. This means that a critical question posed by the original policy—regarding the effects of roads on streams—cannot be addressed now. The report does not establish the minimum road system needed at the forest level, as the national guidance directed. It does not establish priorities for road reconstruction, maintenance, or decommissioning, which is the ultimate goal of the national policy—to save the agency money by shrinking its road system.

Apparently, the Forest Service's intention is to fill in the missing information on a watershed-by-watershed basis. Three watersheds have been done thus far (Upper Williams, Glady, and Cherry River); the intent on the MNF is to complete two per year, to reach the total of 31 watersheds. At this rate, it would be roughly 15 years before the forest could approach some of the major problems the policy was intended to address!

Consider the impact on decisions that will be made over an area larger than a single watershed, for example, which roads to improve, and which to decommission. A watershed approach suggests that those decisions would occur piecemeal, as individual watersheds come "on line" through the assessment process. But many roads would cross into watersheds that haven't yet been assessed. You can probably think of other problems with the piecemeal approach—for instance, analyzing the cumulative effects of constructing new roads, when *the road system as a whole* has not been analyzed.

The report is presented as a "draft," acknowledging that much information is incomplete, and some requested analysis is undone. We would like to know more about the Forest Service's plans for filling in the missing pieces.

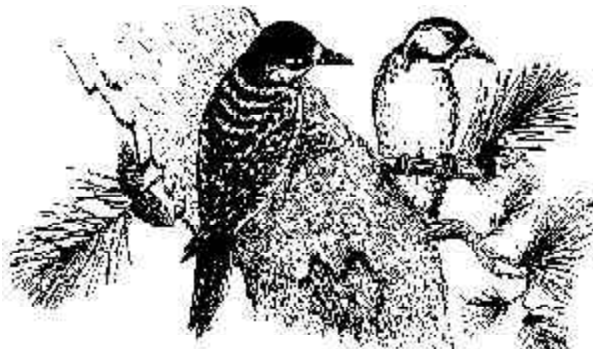
Some key facts from the report:

- The report admits that the annual cost to maintain the entire road system is "considerably higher" than the \$1.69 million allocated. The forest defers to the future roughly 10x what they place in the maintenance category; thus, a backlog develops quickly.
- There is a discussion of the unique features of roadless areas that may be impacted by road building.
- 5th-level watersheds are ranked, based on their road densities, and on the presence of erodible soils. There are 45 miles of roads in areas with a high potential for mass wasting (in which

an entire slope fails). There are over 103,000 acres with slopes greater than 50%, containing 17 miles of roads considered at high risk for failure. There are 115 miles of roads crossing colluvial soils on a 15% slope or greater; these are considered at moderate risk for failure. Some 45 miles of road are described as having a high potential for slippage.

- Watersheds of concern are identified along with those supplying drinking water to municipalities. (Note: Blackwater River supplies 7 municipalities.)
- Potential decommission targets: 553 miles of road are within 100 feet of a stream; 1410 miles of road are within 250 feet of a stream. All of these roads should be considered hydrologically connected to the adjacent stream until proven otherwise. Note that not all streams and not all roads are mapped, and therefore many are absent from this analysis—so this is an underestimate of the problem.
 - Another good source of decommission targets: roads intersecting wetlands/on hydric soils (23 miles of these).
 - The analysis admits it does not know where its areas of high aquatic diversity are.
 - The report admits "most species are adversely impacted by roads," including huntable species like black bear and wild turkey. Lots of discussion of roads' negative effects on sensitive species.
- The report states that 160,000 acres are considered geologically sensitive and soil disturbance is to be avoided.
- Federal lands provide 75% of available land for outdoor recreation in West Virginia. The MNF provides 52% of the total available in the state.

It appears that there is enough information available on some items that prudent decisions to protect soil and water resources can be made now (e.g., no new road building on slopes over 15% grade, or no new roads on geologically sensitive areas; decommission those existing in those areas, etc.). We have just begun to work on the details of this report. We feel it will provide us valuable information as we go into Forest Plan revision and in doing wildlands inventories. With the help of The Wilderness Society, we hope to make maps of roads that are at greatest risk, as candidates for decommissioning. Our goal is to get the worst roads off line for good. We may need the help of our fellow activists to identify these, especially the smaller roads which are not mapped.



“KEEP IT PUBLIC” CAMPAIGN SPARKS BROAD SUPPORT FOR PROTECTING BLACKWATER CANYON TRAIL

By Judy Rodd, Director, Friends of Blackwater, Senior Vice President, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

In just over two months, citizens have sent over six thousand individual comments to the United States Forest Service, in support of the Blackwater Canyon Trail and opposing a plan to turn the trail into a commercial logging road. (Although the current formal comment period ended February 3, the Service says that they will still receive comments, which can be sent at www.saveblackwater.org.)

In the fall of 2002, John Crites, owner of the logging company Allegheny Wood Products, asked the Forest Service to allow Crites to turn the ten-mile-long Blackwater Canyon Trail, located on public land, into a commercial logging road.

In January 2003, Friends of Blackwater began a “Keep It Public” campaign that has received support from a large number of groups — both in West Virginia and around the country. The “Keep It Public” campaign demands that the Forest Service perform a full environmental impact statement on Crites’ road proposal. The campaign seeks to preserve the wildlife, scenic, tourism, and historic values of the Blackwater Canyon for use by hunters, fishermen, hikers, bikers, kayakers, and nature walkers.

More than Six Thousand Individual Comments

More than six thousand people have sent mail and e-mail comments to the Forest Service so far, and this may be the largest number of comments ever on an individual Monongahela National Forest scoping request. (In a scoping request, the Forest Service asks for comments on what and how they should study in considering a proposal.)

Following are excerpts from some of the comments:

“I’ve had the pleasure of riding a mountain bike on this trail twice, and it is beautiful beyond description. It has to be God’s prototype for Heaven! Please don’t allow Mr. Crites to destroy something that can never be repaired or replaced!”

“You are the steward of this forest. Therefore, you carry the burden of our trust. If you do not take the responsibility to stop this latest cut-and-develop frenzy besieging our country, who will? If not now, when?”

“An out-of-state friend once noted that the one picture you could be sure of

finding in any West Virginia home was of the Blackwater Canyon. Please take any necessary steps to ensure this treasure is not lost to future generations.”

“The very serious nature of John Crites’ request must be analyzed by a full EIS. Anything less will be an inadequate response on the part of the Forest Service.



As a graduate student in Forestry at Virginia Tech, I certainly support the need to harvest timber; however harvesting it from Blackwater Canyon is not appropriate; converting a popular recreation trail into a logging road is not good forest management, in my opinion.”

“My family and friends often bike and hike on this trail. It is special to us and we would like to see it preserved so that we and future generations can enjoy it. The Blackwater Canyon area is a jewel for us to treasure. Please consider to study the negative effects that logging would cause.”

Broad Support for Campaign

The “Keep It Public” campaign’s kick-off press conference was attended by campaign supporters from the West Virginia Sierra Club, West Virginia Citizen Action Group, West Virginia Environmental Council, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, West Virginia League of Women Voters, American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, West Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Coalition for Responsible Logging, and Religious Campaign for Forest Preservation. The West Virginia Rails to Trails Council, West Virginia Native American Coalition, West Virginia Trails Association, and West Virginia Wildlife Federation have sent letters to the Forest Service. The West Virginia Rivers Coalition and West Virginia Whitewater Association sent action alerts to their membership.

The “Keep It Public” campaign is also being supported by national environmental organizations. The groups American Rivers, American Lands, and the Wilderness

Society sent out alerts to their membership, calling for comments to be sent to the Forest Service; and the American Hiking Society ran an article on the controversy. These groups agree with the “Keep It Public” campaign — that if the Forest Service does anything less than prepare a full environmental impact statement, it would be a terrible rollback of vital national laws designed to protect public land.

Just the Beginning

“This is just the beginning,” said Judy Rodd, Director of Friends of Blackwater. “We expect our public officials to do the legally and morally correct thing. We are doing this for future generations — and we will protect the uniquely beautiful Canyon Trail, and our public land.”

For more information, contact Friends of Blackwater at www.saveblackwater.org; or 1-877-WVA-LAND.

ACTION ALERT!

TELL THE FOREST SERVICE TO save Blackwater Canyon Trail 115 from aggressive loggers. It won’t cost you a penny. Not doing so will cost your children the opportunity to experience West Virginia’s crown jewel.

Tell your friends and family to visit our website — www.saveblackwater.org — to send an instant e-mail comment letter to the Forest Service. Just click on “Action Alert” and follow directions.

To comment by real mail, write US Forest Supervisor Clyde Thompson today.

For more information phone (304) 345-7663

THERE IS NO FRIGATE LIKE A BOOK...

The Last American Man by Elizabeth Gilbert. (Viking Penguin, 2002).

Reviewed by Kathleen Parker

The Last American Man is the story of Eustace Conway, an energetic fellow who through-hiked the Appalachian Trail in four-and-a-half months, hunting and gathering along the way, carrying nothing more than a sleeping bag, knife, rope, and cooking pot. This man rode his horse across the country, Georgia to California. He lived with the Navajo of New Mexico and the Maya of Guatemala learning traditional skills and native philosophy. He developed a program of environmental education, and by the time he was 40, he acquired a thousand acres in the Blue Ridge of North Carolina. From this property, "Turtle Island," Eustace Conway preaches a back-to-the-land ethic. Live lightly on the earth. Reject consumerism. Resist thoughtless development. Attune to the cycles of nature. What's not to like?

One thing not to like is the prose style of author Elizabeth Gilbert. In an effort to adopt a conversational style, she lapses into arrhythmic, fragmented sentences and choppy paragraphs, a phrasing that probably works for Instant Messenger but becomes annoying at extended reading. Gilbert also seems intent on placing herself in the middle of Eustace's story. She is determined to convince us that she is as cool as Eustace is exceptional: "Now I have a habit of speculating about the sex life of every single person I meet," she announces. Or later, "I get drunk with Eustace Conway sometimes. It's one of my favorite things to do with him. OK, it's one of my favorite things to do with almost anybody..." Too much information, Ms. Gilbert. We don't want to hear about your personal habits; we want to learn about Eustace Conway.

Indeed Eustace Conway is what's likeable about this book. He is the product of a peculiarly troubled family, leaving home at age 17 to live in a teepee and otherwise fend for himself. His mother had already taught him some basic skills in primitive camping, and he acquired other expertise from helpful acquaintances ranging from a museum curator to Appalachian farmers (who Gilbert routinely calls "hillbilly"). "Eustace is not merely a hermit or a hippie or even a survivalist. He does not live in the woods because he's hiding from us, or because he's growing excellent weed, or because he's storing guns for the imminent race war," Gilbert reports. "He lives in the woods because he belongs there".

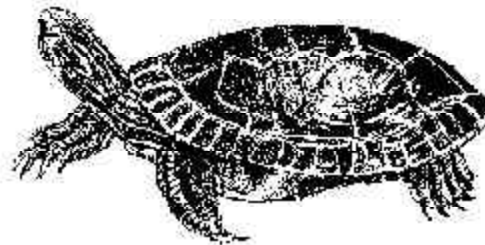
Eustace Conway thinks other people belong in the woods as well. Gilbert places Turtle Island in the context of historic utopian communities in the U.S., from Shakers to counterculture communes. She ascribes to Conway the belief that, "If you can get yourself a piece of land and some serious motivation, you can start a small project that will grow and inspire a massive change across an entire country." Unfortunately, like most of the American utopian communities, Turtle Island does not flourish as Conway had hoped. He is beset by problems (many of his own making) and ends up doubting his vision of redeeming American society. "He wonders why he's thrown his life into the breach to save everybody else's life. Why he allows his sacred land to be overrun by clumsy fools who treat the place so roughly. He wonders how it came to pass that, when all he ever wanted was to be nature's lover, he feels he has become her pimp instead."

Gilbert reveals the complex and often contradictory aspects of Eustace Conway. He is not just some Grizzly Adams type out befriending the bears, but someone who makes wheeler-dealer land

transactions, appeases health inspectors, and undertakes blatant self-promotion in order to get revenue-building gigs at schools, fairs, and festivals. Conway has to make compromises in order to connect people with "the high art and godliness of nature." It seems to be easier for Conway to find compromise in dealings with bureaucracy than in his personal relationships. Gilbert records Conway's failed friendships and broken romances, and concludes, "He has too few of the basic skills to face the mountains and valleys and unpredictable weather patterns of real love between flawed and wonderful human adults." Eustace Conway, while likeable as the subject of this book, is apparently less so as the subject of a romantic liaison.

Gilbert seems a little starry-eyed herself when it comes to analyzing Eustace Conway, admitting that his company leaves her "a little dizzy with that excitement, a little irrational." But Conway is scarcely alone in his ability to live simply and skillfully off the land. One does not have to look far in Appalachia to find people who can identify medicinal herbs, locate morel mushrooms, skin a rabbit, shoe a horse, or, for that matter, make a meal of roadkill. Gilbert is apparently dazzled by these abilities, but they are hardly exceptional. She saw a lot of stereotypes in North Carolina — the locals live in "tin-roof shacks" with yards full of "fossilized appliances", and standing in the doorway is a frightened woman in an apron who "had probably never seen a man at her door who wasn't a family member." But if she had looked a little harder she would have seen Appalachians displaying the same competence as Conway, with less showmanship and more authenticity.

What is exceptional about Eustace Conway is his driving passion for sharing his love of nature with others. He clearly, sincerely, strongly believes Americans need a renewed understanding of the natural world. While Turtle Island did not evolve according to plan, Conway's work has made a difference in the lives of hundreds if not thousands of people who have learned from him some lessons on returning to a more natural way of living. It is good to be reminded that there are people around us who view the environment as something more than a consumable commodity. Author Gilbert makes the grand claim that "The history of Eustace Conway is the history of man's progress on the North American continent." It is enough to know the history of this one man's progress, and to be heartened thereby.



WHAT'S OUT THERE

by J. MICHAEL BECHER

What's Out There.

by J. Michael Becher

The Spring Peeper

We've already passed the first traditional spring forecast on February the 2nd of this year with mixed reviews from our groundhog friends. Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow predicting 6 more weeks of winter, while Frenchcreek Fred the West Virginia prognosticator saw only the end of cold and snow. As the first few weeks have past we've got to give the nod to old Phil, but with all the controversy in the animal kingdom how can we reliably tell when winter's icy firm grasp will finally give way to the pleasant caress of early spring? I suggest looking away from our confused mammalian meteorologists and turning to a taxon with a greater sensitivity to changes in temperature and, hopefully, a more reliable predictor to a change in seasons. This month I would like to focus our attention on a very vocal member of the Class *Amphibia* who will announce the coming of spring in a voice that very well might drive the groundhog back into his hole. This animal is a tiny frog known as the Spring Peeper, *Pseudacris crucifer*.

Spring Peepers generally begin their mating cycle in early to mid-March and earn their name from the call that the male uses to attract the female of the species. The males call in single short notes of uniform tone and high pitch, "peep." Their call has been described as similar to that of a young chicken, but a better description in my mind is that of a dog's squeak toy, only with a slightly higher pitch. Males gather together at potential breeding sites and call incessantly

all night long every night for months in a row in order to get a chance with a female (now that's perseverance). The females are the more selective of the species and will choose their mates based on the strength and quality of the call. The first



Spring Peeper, Photo by Paul Kosnik

spring rains initiate breeding in *Pseudacris crucifer* and from then on the loquacious little frogs can be heard calling on any warm spring night up until the end of the breeding season, sometime between late May to mid June.

Males will gather together around potential breeding sites in order to be the most effective at attracting the females. Because of this grouping behavior, hundreds of frogs will often gather at the same site and peep together in near deafening harmony. Audible measurements of these frogs have been taken at over 110 decibels. That is roughly equivalent to hearing jets on the runway of an airport. Calls of the peeper are fairly regular, with many individuals calling together. In order to be heard, others

will try to cry in between calls of the stronger males. This creates a sort of loud rhythmic buzz at a good peeper pool.

Although Spring Peepers are actually tree frogs they, as all amphibians, are forced to lay their eggs in water. Because fish are such strong predators of the frog, however, the only breeding sites that are very successful are places where fish cannot survive. Ponds that either dry up in the summer or freeze solid during the winter, are not suitable for fish, but are great potential spots to find Spring Peepers.

Easily heard, the tiny peeper is not so easily found. Each frog is very small only around 2.5 cm in length and they often hide at the bases of shrubs or in tall grass. Add to that the fact that they typically call only at night, and it becomes a real challenge to see what is so easily heard. If you do happen to get a look at one, however, they are easily distinguished by the presence of an "X" shaped mark on the back. Color varies from a dull green to a ruddy gray.

The range of the Spring Peeper is vast, especially for an amphibian. They can be found in almost every state east of the Rockies and from Southern Florida north as far as Nova Scotia. The little frogs are common across West Virginia and are found in pools even at elevation. So next time you are out for a brisk evening walk and hear the call of the peeper either softly in the distance or ringing steadily in your ears even after you've gone back indoors you can smile to yourself knowing that the true harbingers of spring have spoken (or more descriptively screamed) and the cold quiet solitude of winter has been shattered.

OUR READERS WRITE

Presently I am attending Greensboro Day School in North Carolina. A month ago, I was assigned an environmental project in my English class that I felt strongly about. I chose the issues surrounding mountaintop removal in the Appalachian Mountains. I visit the mountains many times each year, and it distresses me to think that one by one they are disappearing.

I agree with the Highlands Conservancy in their action to file suit in federal court against the inaction of the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection. If the few regulations that have to be followed are ignored, the greater the damage is to

the environment; however, after researching deeper into the issue, I am also concerned with the economic effect that would result from the elimination of mountaintop removal. Our federal government has invested millions of dollars into West Virginia for the sole purpose of helping its people and providing an energy source for our country. It is time for West Virginia to recognize the value of its land may be greater than the coal that is underneath it.

I hope that all parties surrounding this devastating issue will work together to develop a long-term solution. This solution should include a wider variety of industries

that will provide more jobs and wealth for the people. In addition, as much as I would like to see this practice eliminated, I understand that it is needed now to help with the country's current energy needs. I hope that since the practice will not cease in the near future, that more environmentally friendly methods are developed, especially those that will minimize the amount of land impacted by the process.

I appreciate your taking the time to read my thoughts on mountaintop removal.
Sincerely,
Caroline Gorga
Greensboro, NC

There's No People Like Snow People

Chip Chase & Laurie Little Receive the West Virginia Environmental Council's 2003 Green Entrepreneurs Award

By Dave Saville

White Grass Ski Touring Center; anyone that's been there, has eaten lunch or dinner in the Cafe, sat around the woodstove enjoying the company of friends, skied the trails up to Bald Knob, or carved a few tele-turns on the face, knows that this is no ordinary place. It is certainly one of the most unique cross country ski touring centers in the nation. There's an enigmatic magic about it.

Chip Chase and Laurie Little's White Grass Ski Touring Center and Cafe is a textbook example of sustainable eco-tourism in action.

Not only do they provide income and employment to the local community, but they also work to protect the resources on which the local economy is based. For over 20 years they have worked to empower the local community and give it a sense of pride in their natural resources. They educate visitors about the importance and fragility of the eco-systems of Canaan Valley, and actively involve them in their protection. They have truly maximized the economic benefits while simultaneously minimizing the environmental costs of their operation. What Chip and Laurie have accomplished at White Grass exemplifies a viable and important economic alternative to the exploitation of the environment.

The entire nature of the operation is low-impact. Simplicity rules. There is a non-complicated nature about the place that's pervasive. It flows. I mean, these guys were recycling way before it was cool. And at White Grass, recycling doesn't stop with bottles and cans. Chip and his staff are masters of invention and Jacks of all trades. They heat solely with wood, and they use about \$1.50 worth of electricity a day to run the place. They impeccably maintain the trails to eliminate erosion and ground disturbance is minimized. They have pioneered an innovative method of capturing snow, using portable snow fences, called "snow farming," that allows them to create ski-touring opportunities with minimum snowfall.

Laurie runs the White Grass Cafe. They offer simple, yet very creative natural foods. They specialize in ethnically diverse foods, homemade soups, breads, desserts and some of the best vegetarian around. The smells emerging from the Cafe as you are coming off a long day on the mountain are ethereal. As if having these foods prepared for you wasn't enough, Laurie and Mary Beth Gwyer have put a sampling of their favorite recipes into a book; *White Grass Cafe - Cross Country Cooking*. I highly recommend it! Highlands Conservancy members know Laurie, and her fare, from the many meals she has served at Spring and Fall Reviews over the years.

Of course Chip and Laurie would be the first ones to tell you that they certainly couldn't do all this alone. Their 3 boys, Cory, Adam and John Morgan can usually be found hanging around and helping out. Their partners and staff at Whitegrass are die-hards. Mike Sayre, Tom Preston, Barry Baumgardner, Alice Fleischman, Matt Marcus, Bill Moore, Lester Lind, Nick Waite, Brad Moore, Rick Landenberger, Sue Haywood, Mary Beth Gwyer, Rick Krogh, Tony Barnes, Sean Sullivan, Ben McKean and Charlie Waters, are just a few of the friendly folks that make White Grass a place that you just can't wait to get back to. All together over 30 people are on the pay role at White Grass. And who are they? - Friends. Chip and Laurie have discovered the secret to successfully disprove the common business wisdom that says you should never hire friends. Friends are the only people working at White Grass. And you know it as soon as you walk through the door, or often-times before you even get to the door.

There are lots of special places that keep people coming back

to White Grass too. Fern Gully, Bald Knob, Springer Orchard, Powderline, Double Trouble, Round Top and even the adjacent Dolly Sods Wilderness. The views of Canaan Valley, Cabin Mountain, and all the natural splendor of the best of the West Virginia Highlands surrounds you. Just skiing or snowshoeing up to the warming hut, having a granola bar, and skiing back down is a new adventure every time.

What is a full-fledged farm in the summertime turns into a

cross country skiing wonderland in the wintertime. Life-long Canaan Valley resident and farmer Dr. Randall Reed owns the farm that becomes White Grass in the wintertime. Chip and Laurie and some of their staff become farmhands in the summer in exchange for use of the farm in the winter. This arrangement helps protect more of Canaan Valley's open space and perpetuates the local farming culture of the Valley too.

The business is run in an integral fashion with the sustainable lifestyle of Chip and Laurie. No hypocrites these guys. They're courageous, even heroic in my mind. They are not afraid to take a stand for what they believe in. They have supported protecting the special attributes of Canaan Valley, and the West Virginia Highlands, often in the face of ridicule by fellow local business people and developers. They seem to have firmly grasped the concept of sustainability that says that you cannot destroy the resources the local economy, and their own business, are dependent upon.

But they don't stop there. Not only do they walk the walk, but they work hard to share these beliefs with everyone who comes in contact with them. They are deeply involved in and committed to environmental education, including Tucker County school students. They sponsor the Special Olympics and help train the athletes. Chip leads outings for the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's *Mountain Odyssey* program, and coordinates with the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge in the *Winter on the Refuge* outing series. Whether it's learning about animal tracks or the constellations, Snoeshoe Hare or balsam fir, you can't help but come away from the place without a renewed sense of appreciation for the winter-time world around us. These guys are contagious!

Even their website is a testimony to the sustainable way of living and doing business that they espouse. Chip updates the site just about daily and includes articles on important environmental issues here in West Virginia and Nationwide. You can log onto www.whitegrass.com and learn how cross country skiers are working to free Yellowstone National Park from snowmobiles, or about volunteer opportunities on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge. There are testimonials from many of their customers to the awe that they feel from experiencing Canaan Valley in the wintertime. The website has become a central clearinghouse and sounding board for Highlands affectionadoes.

The thing I love about White Grass is the karma. Talk about positive energy flow! People go there just to be amongst it. People helping people to smile and have fun, and to fully and completely imbibe the spirit of the Wild Wonderful *natural* West Virginia Highlands.

Congratulations to Chip and Laurie for setting the example of green entrepreneurialism, and being awarded the West Virginia Environmental Council's 2003 Green Entrepreneur Award.

