

## Green Jobs Yes, Green Energy Maybe WVHC's Winter Board Meeting

The Highlands Conservancy and two partners have hired a Wilderness Campaign coordinator to work for wilderness protection of pristine areas in the Monongahela National Forest. Matt Keller of Morgantown will begin by creating a timeline for the campaign. The position has been funded by The Wilderness Society, which will oversee the campaign in association with the Highlands Conservancy and the West Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club. Matt will work with members of the organizations to identify potential areas and encourage grassroots support.

Dave Saville and Bob Marshall, the Highlands Conservancy's representatives on the campaign, said the current Mon National Forest management plan revision must include a review of roadless areas for their potential as wilderness. The Wilderness Campaign will participate in that process. In addition, it will make its own identification of eligible areas and work for congressional authorization. Wilderness designation requires legislation, so eventually Matt Keller will have to spend some time in Washington. He'll have help from Helen McGinnis, a Highlands Conservancy member who played an active role in that process when Dolly Sods and Otter Creek gained wilderness status.

At our meeting in Flatwoods on January 25, the board also discussed a second green job. Julian Martin, who served on the selection committee for the Sierra Club's new regional environmental justice coordinator, said Bill Price of Whitesville was named to the position. Bill has been active with Coal River Mountain Watch.

Last October, proposals for new "wind farms" along the Allegheny Front dominated the board's agenda. Ultimately we remained neutral on the biggest project, which is being developed by NedPower, but we adopted a policy opposing wind power projects "that would degrade scenic vistas from Canaan Valley, Dolly Sods, Seneca Rocks, Spruce Knob, and other special places in West Virginia." Very quickly we were called on to apply that policy to a wind energy project that would place 65 turbines on top of Rich Mountain, between Elkins and Harman.

Peter Shoenfeld brought to the January meeting maps, background information, a draft letter to the developer, a press release, and a motion. (See Peter's article in this issue). The Highlands Conservancy voted to oppose this project, not only because of its visual impact on special places but also because of the ecological value of this high (over 4000 foot) ridge.

The recent interest in wind power, both pro and con, has led to a change in our committee structure. President Frank Young announced the formation of a Green Energy committee to work on all sorts of alternative energy issues, including the controversial matter of siting. Frank named Peter as chair of the wind power subcommittee.

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Bob Marshall, our new treasurer, gave his first report on our financial health. Like other organizations and individuals, we are being squeezed between the declining value of our investments and the increasing costs of doing business: insurance, postage, general supplies. So far we have been able to spend slightly more than we have taken in, but that isn't a policy we'd like to continue. A fundraising letter will go out this week. Please look for it and respond as you're able. And we agreed to increase our dues for the first time in many years: regular membership will change from \$15 to \$25 per year. A \$15 option will remain for seniors, students, "introductory," and "other." The insert in this month's Voice offers a last chance to join at the old rates. The new dues structure should allow us to balance our budget for 2003. Membership continued to increase in 2002—it has nearly tripled in the past five years.

Some other issues that came before the board at this meeting:

- \* Comments submitted to Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge on its "compatibility determination," asking that hikers and photographers be allowed the same access as hikers and fishermen.
- \* Comments submitted to Monongahela National Forest opposing Allegheny Wood Products' request to use the Blackwater Canyon rail-trail as a logging road.
- \* The Bush Administration's push to "expedite" national forest planning and endangered species plans in order to cut more trees.
- \* Advocacy for awareness and preservation of special places on private lands.
- \* Comments on Environmental Impact Statements on two sections of Corridor H between Kerens and Davis, and our request for information on waste and fill overruns in recently completed sections of that highway.
- \* And finally, in our continuing struggle against abuses by the mining industry and the failure of government agencies to enforce mining laws: mining permits issued without the required endangered species review by the Corps of Engineers and Fish and Wildlife Service; permits for smaller valley fills issued without consideration of their cumulative impacts; and unpermitted discharges into stream segments between valley fills and sediment ponds.