

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

By John McFerrin

The Board meeting was a combination of lively controversy and plodding necessity.

First, the plodding necessity: the Board approved a budget for 2006. Although the budget was as close to being balanced as it has been in years, it was still a deficit budget. We deal with this by requiring committees who wish to spend money to assume the bulk of the responsibility for raising that money. The result is that the budget is effectively balanced; if committees don't raise the money, they don't spend it.

The controversies began with Administrative Assistant Dave Saville's proposal that we consolidate our activities on the Monongahela National Forest (outings, advocacy, trail maintenance, monitoring) in a special part of the Voice and have someone designated to coordinate those activities. In other places groups set up to do this kind of coordination name themselves the Friends of the

The Board had all manner of questions. Since the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy already does a lot on the Monongahela National Forest, we are already, in effect, the Friends of the Mon, even if we don't call ourselves that. At the same time, the Mon has lots of other friends, both individual and organizational. WVHC can't very well hold itself out as the Mon's best friend when there are all these other groups and people who are also the Mon's friends. Because WVHC already exists, as do other groups, there was no enthusiasm for creating a new organization to do this work.

It was the sense of the Board that we should organize our work on the Monongahela better. After chewing over the details of how we should do this, the Board passed the problem of how to go about this off to a committee.

While we agreed on the big picture of the need to coordinate our work on the Monongahela National Forest, there was no such agreement on wind power. Although there has never been a single statement of our position on wind farms, one could infer a position from discussions and votes on proposed projects. Our position had been that we would oppose specific wind farms that presented a threat to wildlife (most notably birds and bats) and would oppose those located in "special places" (whatever that means).

At its January, 2006, meeting the Board addressed the Beech Mountain project in Greenbrier County and the Jack Mountain project in Pendleton County. It voted to oppose the Beech Mountain project solely because the developers had not adequately addressed threats to birds and bats. In a closely divided vote, it agreed to make a donation to the Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County to assist it in opposing the Jack Mountain wind project. This is at least arguably a departure from previous positions. For Conservancy president Hugh Rogers' take on where we are going on this issue, see his column on page 2 of this issue.

Equally unsettled was the issue of how we treat trails in the Monongahela National Forest that are not officially recognized by the Forest Service. On the one hand, they exist on the ground. On the other hand, they are not part of the official trail system and the Forest Service discourages their use or creation. (Continued next page)

Since the Board did not have to take a position on this issue, it didn't. The issue is, however, looming and may have to be resolved. It may land back in the Board's lap in the context of the next edition of the Hiking Guide.

In addition to these contentious issues, Administrative Assistant Dave Saville gave a report on membership (steadily growing) and Cindy Rank gave us an update on the latest perfidy of the coal industry and the perfunctory efforts of public officials to respond. See page 7 of this issue for details.