



# *The Highlands Voice*

Since 1967, The Monthly Publication of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Volume 54      No. 7      July, 2021

## **Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Project Kicks Off**

By Dave Johnston

With the signing of a partnership agreement between the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) and the Monongahela National Forest (MNF), the long-planned project to address the impacts of increased visitation at Dolly Sods Wilderness is off the ground. Under the partnership, dubbed Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards, WVHC will provide volunteers for activities identified by WVHC and the MNF as helping to preserve and protect the Wilderness and enhance visitor experience. WVHC is now actively recruiting volunteers for the project.

Like many wild, natural and scenic areas around the country, Dolly Sods experienced a dramatic increase in visitation during the pandemic. This exacerbated what was already a long term-trend, as social media and word of mouth have increased awareness of the wonders of Dolly Sods and encouraged more and more people to come see for themselves. But the pandemic brought out many people who

were relatively inexperienced in the outdoors, and unfamiliar with the unique characteristics of the wilderness, or with standards for basic backcountry behavior and Leave No Trace (LNT) practices.

The impacts included gridlock on the narrow forest roads, parking in meadows, camping next to roads, establishment of new backcountry campsites crowded together, trash and other litter, cutting of standing trees for firewood, and poor personal hygiene, including fields of “TP flowers” adjacent to campsites.

The famously wet and muddy trails of Dolly Sods saw an increased number of “bypass routes” impacting the wetlands adjacent to the trail. As the trails in Dolly Sods are not blazed (to minimize evidence of human presence), some people felt the need to carve arrows and helpful directions into trees. Superfluous rock stacking (and other inappropriate structures), which disturbs both aquatic and terrestrial habitats, became more common and introduced potential confusion



**(More on p. 4)**

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## Thoughts from our President

By Larry Thomas

Summer has arrived and during June there were many severe storms with heavy rains here in the highlands. It is fantastic to see the transition of the trees that have leafed out in their different shades of green, wildflowers blooming everywhere in so many colors and wildlife mothers (birds and animals) raising a new generation, carrying on the life cycle as Mother Nature intends.

It is hard to believe that it now been a year since we were celebrating the announcement by Dominion Energy and Duke Energy that the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project had been cancelled. Although cancelled, there is significantly more work to be done as Atlantic Coast Pipeline, LLC is in now in the process of pipeline restoration. The pipeline restoration is being monitored by the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA) as a part of its continued activities. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) is a coalition member of ABRA.

### **Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Project**

An article in the May issue of *The Highlands Voice* announced that the Dolly Sods project was moving closer to action. See the great article in this month's issue that tells all about what is happening.

### **Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance Conservation Hub Project**

The September 2020 issue of the Highlands Voice article "The Conservation Hub: Strengthening Environmental Analysis and Improving Public Participation" told us that among the lessons learned from the recent fight against the Atlantic Coast Pipeline project were the limitations that regulatory agencies often have in conducting in-depth analysis of a project's impacts, particularly when multiple projects would produce cumulative impacts. Also, the complexity of many projects creates challenges for members of the public wishing to comment and participate as stakeholders in decision-making processes. In the article ABRA announcement of its new program called The Conservation Hub which will address these and other deficiencies of the permitting and regulatory processes that govern projects in the central Appalachian region.

WVHC submitted an application to the ABRA Conservation Hub Advisory Committee for a project to address the issue of Off-Road Vehicles/ All-Terrain Vehicles (ORVs/ATVs) use on public lands in West Virginia. West Virginia public lands are extremely important to West Virginians providing significant benefits to the public, our environment, and our economy and WVHC has long opposed ORVs/ATVs recreation on West Virginia public lands. The request is for the establishment of a Conservation Hub project concerning ORVs/ATVs recreation on our public lands to help to strengthen the environmental analysis, facilitate public participation in the process, enhance the project's transparency, strengthen its accountability, and provide relevant information about the project to the legislators, regulatory agencies, and the public. The Advisory Committee has approved the project.

### **Section 401 Water Quality Certification for Mountain Valley Pipeline**

WVHC along with 13 other organizations signed on to a letter of comments to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection Division of Water and Waste Management (WVDEP) stating that the Mountain Valley Pipeline's (MVP) 401 Application fails to address significant impacts to the state's water resources that will occur as a result of the project. Because of the failure, it stated that WVDEP must deny the application based on the

fact that MVP cannot meet water quality standards and adverse impacts to water quality and aquatic resources are eminent if the construction is allowed to proceed. Further, the letter requests an antidegradation review and 401 Water Quality Certification for boring activities accompanied with additional comment periods.

On Monday, June 28 the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers extended the deadline for WVDEP to determine whether the water quality impact of constructing the MVP across waterbodies would be too negative to allow. The deadline is now November 29.

### **Bear Rocks/Allegheny Front Preserves Named 600<sup>th</sup> National Natural Landmark**

The National Natural Landmark Program (NNL) has named the Bear Rocks and Allegheny Front Preserve as a National Natural Landmark. The Preserves, which total 1,204 acres, are owned by The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia, and became the 600<sup>th</sup> NNL designation.

The NNL Program recognizes and encourages the conservation of sites that contain outstanding biological and geological resources. Sites are designated by the Secretary of the Interior for their condition, illustrative character, rarity, diversity and value to science and education. Additional criteria states that potential sites for NNL designation must be one of the best examples of a type of biological community or geological feature in its bio physiographic province.

Congratulations to The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia.  
**Stargazing Backpacks for Those Interested in Night Sky Viewing**

The Watoga Foundation, Green Bank Observatory and Pocahontas County Libraries and Visitors Centers have partnered to make stargazing backpacks for those interested in night sky viewing.

Each backpack will contain a pair of 50×10 magnification binoculars, a tripod, two children's books ["There Once Was a Sky Full of Stars" and "Counting on Katherine," the story of NASA mathematician and physics pioneer, Katherine Johnson, from White Sulphur Springs], two guidebooks, "How to Explore the Night Sky" and "Simply Stargazing," a compass, astronomy playing cards, a red light flashlight, a GBO notepad and various maps and instructions for finding the best places to view the night sky in Pocahontas County.

The backpacks are available at the county libraries will be loaned out in much the same way as they loan out books.

2021 continues to be another busy year for the Conservancy and the highlands of West Virginia and we will keep you informed, as events occur, through *The Highlands Voice*.

# What YOU have done and what YOU can personally do to slow climate change and temperature rise

By Jeff Witten and West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Climate Change Committee

WV Mountaineers are resourceful and resilient: “Ask not what others can do to slow climate change - ask what YOU can personally do.”

Good news, since 2007 total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions have steadily decreased; progress has been made. A small increase in 2018 and 2019 from Industrial sources was the result of across-the-board job creation with record low unemployment and record high number of people working. Of course, the 2020 pandemic had a much different impact on jobs. We will see what 2021 brings.

The U.S., with the world’s leading economy, is no longer in the top ten countries ranked by greenhouse gas emissions per capita. Australia and Canada are in the top ten. The U.S. has slowly and consistently reduced per capita emissions for almost 20 years while most of our peers have increased. Much work remains to be done to de-carbonize our economy, and we can continue to do better.

Our long-term decrease in total emissions was primarily due to lower CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion that was a result of multiple factors. These include a decrease in total energy use and a continued shift from coal to less carbon intensive and less expensive natural gas and growing renewables. Here is what YOU did: YOU bought more efficient transportation, installed LED bulbs, insulated your home, and demanded that major industrial energy producers and consumers reduce their carbon footprint. Maybe you bought an electric or hybrid car or installed solar!

Thirty-two years ago, we were told the growing hole in the Ozone Layer was widening resulting in an increase in harmful ultraviolet rays from the Sun because of Freon gas and other chlorinated fluorocarbons. YOU demanded that governments eliminate the offending chemicals, and you bought new technology that made your air conditioners and refrigerators more friendly. The result, in 2019, NASA reported the hole had shrunk to the smallest on record.

There is more YOU can personally do to protect and conserve our Highlands. The nation’s emissions cuts are still not on track to meet the targets under the Paris Climate Accord. Humanity has a tremendous amount of work to do to reduce emissions by 50% below 2005 levels in the next 14 years.

What can YOU personally do now? Of course, continue what you have been doing to be more efficient. And ask for a proposal from a qualified solar panel or geothermal installer for your home. Understand the costs and benefits including selling electricity to your Utility. Take advantage of a 26% federal income tax credit presently available that can significantly lower your installation cost. WV has more than 10 installers; find one near you - getting a quote will cost you nothing and enable you to make an informed decision. You are a Mountaineer; be responsible for your own improvements and contribute. Most importantly, engage with your elected officials and demand policy changes that will decarbonize the world’s economy in time to avert the worst impacts of climate change.

## References:

Job creation: <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/civilian-unemployment-rate.htm>

<https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/inventory-us-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-sinks>

Emissions by country: <https://www.worlddata.info/greenhouse-gas-by-country.php>

Emission per capita: <https://www.unep.org/emissions-gap-report-2020>

U.S. greenhouse emissions: <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

NASA Ozone: <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2019/2019-ozone-hole-is-the-smallest-on-record-since-its-discovery>

*The Highlands Voice* is published monthly by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Articles, letters to the editor, graphics, photos, poetry, or other information for publication should be sent to the editor via the internet or by the U.S. Mail by the last Friday of each month. You may submit material for publication either to the address listed above or to the address listed for Highlands Voice Editor elsewhere in this issue. Electronic submissions are preferred.

*The Highlands Voice* is always printed on recycled paper. Our printer uses 100% post consumer recycled paper when available.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy web page is [www.wvhighlands.org](http://www.wvhighlands.org).

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is a non-profit corporation which has been recognized as a tax exempt organization by the Internal Revenue Service. Its bylaws describe its purpose:

The purposes of the Conservancy shall be to promote, encourage, and work for the conservation—including both preservation and wise use—and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the Nation, and especially of the Highlands Region of West Virginia, for the cultural, social, educational, physical, health, spiritual, and economic benefit of present and future generations of West Virginians and Americans.

## Dolly Sods Stewardship (Continued from p. 1)

with more modest trail marking cairns. One of the key values of wilderness, embodied in the Wilderness Act of 1964, “an opportunity for solitude” has become increasingly hard to come by, especially on weekends.

While the surge in visitation related to the pandemic may recede some (and this remains to be seen), it brought home the continuing need to anticipate and mitigate impacts in popular but



sensitive locations such as Dolly Sods. Given WVHC’s role in advocating for the designation of the Dolly Sods Wilderness, we feel a special sense of stewardship for the area. Members of the Public Lands Committee began discussing what the Conservancy could do in the fall of last year. This led to discussions with MNF representatives about what they needed from volunteers to support their efforts to

preserve and protect the wilderness and associated areas.

The group identified five types of activities that could be undertaken to make a difference in the long-term health of the wilderness. Not all of these will be undertaken immediately, but they form a road map for joint activity by WVHC volunteers and the Forest Service.

### Wilderness Trailhead Stewards

Volunteers will be stationed at popular trailheads during times of peak visitation, mainly on weekends, and engage in brief conversation with visitors about what makes Dolly Sods unique, the values of wilderness, and Leave No Trace practices.

### Trailhead Register Maintenance

The MNF is adding voluntary hiker sign-in registers at trailheads. WVHC has purchased, and donated to MNF, the materials needed for construction of the boxes. These will provide information on the number of visitors and usage patterns that can be used to guide future allocation of resources. WVHC volunteers will periodically check the boxes and replenish supplies, replace register pages, and forward the completed forms to the MNF.

### Campsite Inventory Crew

The MNF plans to conduct yearly or twice-yearly surveys of backcountry campsites in Dolly Sods. Volunteers would hike assigned trails or sections of the wilderness, record the location and condition of campsites, take photos, and make other observations, using a standard form provided by the MNF.

### Trail Maintenance and Rehabilitation Crew

Under the direction of MNF trail specialists, volunteers will assist with trail maintenance, rehabilitation or rerouting. Volunteers may also assist in bringing in supplies, food and drinks to the work site.

### Traffic Monitoring and Documentation

At this point it is not clear whether this aspect will be needed

to supplement MNF actions. If needed, volunteers would monitor and report on traffic and parking conditions, and possibly document with counts and photos.

The partnership agreement between WVHC and the MNF was formalized in mid-June, so we are now ready to recruit volunteers and begin implementation of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Program.

The first project to be kicked off is the Wilderness Trailhead Stewards. WVHC and MNF developed a “script” to introduce the most important information hikers and backpackers need to know before embarking on Dolly Sods trails, designed for a brief (less than one minute) encounter. Several other “key messages” as well as FAQ’s are included to support a more extensive conversation if the visitor has questions. The emphasis is on a friendly, non-intrusive but informative greeting to Dolly Sods.

A MNF Recreation Officer and a couple of WVHC volunteers did a “dry run” of the Trailhead Stewards project during the rainy Memorial Day weekend. We found that all visitors we approached were receptive and appreciative of the messages. A surprising number continued the conversation with questions about Dolly Sods and trail conditions, which gave us an



opportunity to work in additional messages. Because of the heavy rain some creeks were potentially uncrossable and trail conditions were even worse than usual. We gathered information from people coming off the trail and used that to help new visitors enhance their preparedness and plan routes. Overall, we were very pleased with the response and felt strongly that the effort will enhance the long-term health of Dolly Sods as well as visitor enjoyment and satisfaction.

The partnership is planning to start having a regular Trailhead Steward presence at the busiest trailheads by mid-July. We will start with a few hours during weekends, and as the number of volunteers grows we hope to have most trailheads covered during the key times on weekends, holidays, and even some weekdays.

Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards do not need to have any special experience or expertise. There is no specific time commitment required; some people may live close and be available more often, but even those who only visit occasionally are welcome to participate as their schedule allows. We recommend and encourage all volunteers, especially the Trailhead Stewards, to take two online courses on the basics of the Wilderness Act and Leave No Trace awareness. Volunteers will be provided with in-person training by the Forest Service and resources to use at the trailheads. WVHC will provide each volunteer with a WVHC T-shirt and cap to help identify them to visitors.

To receive a volunteer application or for more information, contact Dave Johnston at [dollysodsstewards@gmail.com](mailto:dollysodsstewards@gmail.com).

# Pipeline Inspectors

By Cindy Rank

Failing to get approval of the more general Nationwide 404 Clean Water Act permit to allow Mountain Valley Pipeline's (MVP) stream crossing activities, the company has reapplied for permission via the more exacting individual permit procedure which requires not only approval from the Corps, but also requires the state to certify that those activities meet certain conditions specific to West Virginia.

As the WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) considers MVP's new proposals one has to consider a variety of factors that are important – including DEP's ability to monitor and enforce the conditions of the permits.

In the last two years, the state of West Virginia has asked Mountain Valley Pipeline to pay a bit less than \$600,000 for failing to control erosion and allowing sediment to escape into surface waters. In spite of the fact that the pipeline route is two thirds in West Virginia and only a third in Virginia, the same kind of sloppy construction prompted our neighbor to the east to fine the project's owners \$2.15 million.

Why the disconnect? It's possible that West Virginia officials are biased in favor of big out-of-state energy corporations, certainly. But another cause could be that the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality is just paying more attention. After all, here in WV there are only 15 people responsible for stormwater permit enforcement and only 1 (one) is dedicated specifically to pipelines.

One person for a state with many hundred miles of pipelines, including 200 miles of MVP now under construction and about 200 MVP stream crossings planned or being built. Of course, that one inspector might hope to get some help from the rest of the Department of Environmental Protection stormwater enforcement staff – if they weren't so overwhelmed themselves: i.e., each inspector has upwards of 500 permits to oversee.

Another area in DEP, the Office of Oil & Gas, focuses on wells and drilling but doesn't do much on pipelines and only has a handful of inspectors anyway. Just last year, according to the Charleston Gazette-Mail, the office "resolved to eliminate 14 of about 39 (total) positions," due to a budget shortfall. That's in a state with 60,000 active and 15,000 inactive oil & gas wells.

With so little pipeline oversight we are risking losing valuable, even irreplaceable clear streams that, once clogged with sediment, might never recover.

As the Gazette-Mail recently reported, MVP erosion controls failed after being "overwhelmed" by heavy recent rains in Braxton, Lewis and Webster Counties. But notice – those problems were photographed by a local resident, who then notified the DEP.

Similarly, the paper said a Lewis County landowner reported that flooding in one area destroyed "the pipeline's silt barriers and fencing, washing out the base of timber mats and suggesting that the area is unstable because of deforestation and saturated soil increasing the risk for mass flooding in the valley."

Landowners who prove to be DEP's true eyes and ears on the ground say there is a very real and very serious under-count of violations. Sadly, local folks who have spotted cases of dramatic pollution and gone to DEP have been told that no violations can be written unless an inspector sees the problem firsthand. And obviously, one inspector can't be everywhere, even if alerted in time to see firsthand.

What would have happened if these folks hadn't been doing the DEP's job for it? Would the pipeline have been cited, made to clean up the mess, or been forced to take steps to stop similar issues in the future?

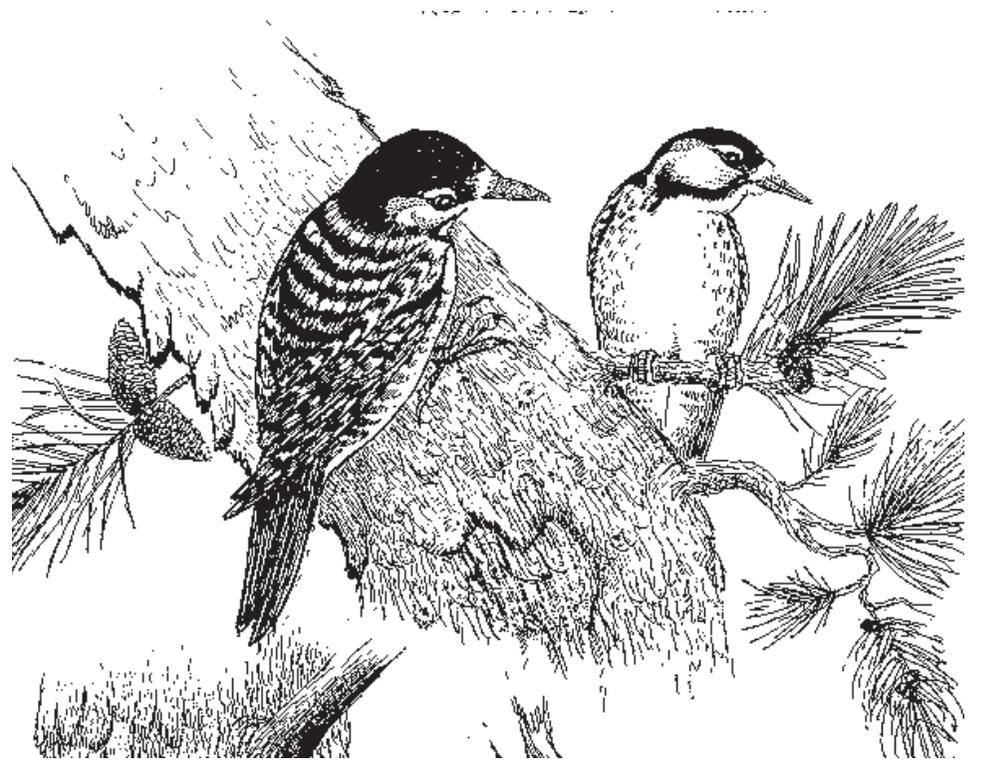
Violations noted by DEP show that MVP has released sediment into streams and rivers on at least 50 separate instances. How many citations would have been made if citizens hadn't been watching? Maybe more importantly, how many could have been prevented if the agency was supervising construction correctly?

The old saying goes, 'follow the money' - if you really want to know what politicians value, look at their budget. What we find repeatedly is our state regulatory agencies don't have the support, encouragement, or investment from the legislature or administration to adequately regulate the big energy companies – and end up doing an underfunded, inadequate job when forced to.

How much better protected would our waters be if the state invested the comparatively small cost of staffing the WVDEP properly? And how much less damage would there be if DEP slowed pipeline construction until an inspector is on site at all the critical moments?

As DEP considers MVP's latest water quality application for 401 certification of its activities crossing streams – with some 200 more stream crossings planned – West Virginia should not certify that work as long as the state lacks the personnel and funding needed for adequate oversight and inspection.

**A version of this commentary first appeared as an Op-Ed in the June 24<sup>th</sup> issue of the Charleston Gazette-Mail.**



**Drawing courtesy of United States Fish and Wildlife Service**

## What's afoot with Turkeyfoot

By Cindy Rank

As noted in the April issue of the *Voice*, West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) approved a surface mine permit for the Republic Energy (formerly Alpha Metallurgical, formerly Contura Energy, formerly Alpha Natural Resources, formerly Massey) Turkeyfoot mine planned for Clear Fork in Raleigh County.

The Turkeyfoot permit encompasses 1,085+ acres of Coal River Mountain and includes a combination of multiple mining methods technically known as 'highwall mining', 'area mining', 'contour mining', 'auger mining', and 'steep slope mining'. Put 'em all together and the end result is more mountains torn apart, more headwater streams obliterated, and daily blasting of rock spreading blankets of poisonous dust onto communities below.

It may not meet the technical definition of Mountaintop Removal, but the effect is quite the same.

Bottom line: folks in southern WV and members of groups like Coal River Mountain Watch are still fighting for their lives and communities as WVDEP continues to permit mammoth surface mines, whatever they're called.

Now comes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to decide whether or not to grant a 404 permit and approve the valley fills that will bury 3.5 miles of streams and 1.79 acres of wetlands. – But only after and in conjunction with WVDEP's evaluation of its own 401 certification that the proposed fills won't violate conditions specific to the state of West Virginia nor violate WV Water Quality Standards.

Comments to the Corps with regard to the Clean Water Act 404 permit are due July 17<sup>th</sup>.

As for WVDEP action, the good folks at Appalmad submitted extensive comments June 18<sup>th</sup> on behalf of WVHC, Appalachian Voices, OVEC, and Sierra.

In brief, our comments state on page 3 that WVDEP must deny Republic Energy's application because (1) the applicant's alternatives analysis is insufficient for purposes of West Virginia's antidegradation policy, (2) the Turkeyfoot Surface Mine will inevitably lead to water quality standards violations, (3) WVDEP has a demonstrated history of inaccurately concluding that valley fills will not cause water quality standards violations, and (4) the proposed compensatory mitigation is inadequate.

**In brief: Valley Fills irrevocably harm streams and will do so here.**

What follows is a 96 page seamlessly woven tapestry linking together highlights of the past twenty years-worth of studies, research, policy papers, court decisions, discharge and in-stream water quality and benthic data.

If anyone doubts that filling headwater streams with mining rubble doesn't have a severe, long-term negative impact on the physical, biological and chemical health and well-being of our precious waters, and those of us who rely on them, I recommend setting aside a few hours to read and digest the lengthy set of comments and the additional CD of a gazillion (I have yet to make an accurate count) exhibits of the complete texts of research, testimony, decisions, and documentation referenced throughout the comments.

Whether or not WVDEP or the Corps have learned anything or developed a spine these past two decades remains to be seen. Meanwhile residents in the Coal River Mountain area will continue to bear the brunt of harmful decisions.

## Overseeing the Overseers

By Cindy Rank

In 2011 the WV Highlands Conservancy and WV Rivers Coalition successfully sued the state regulatory agency, WV Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP), to require them to assume responsibility for treating water at a number of bond forfeiture sites across the state.

One of those sites was the Greendale site in Clay and Nicholas Counties and WVDEP finally issued itself an NPDES permit in 2014. Over the ensuing years a series of compliance schedules and alternative plans and extensions appear to have stymied rather than advanced the construction of a treatment system.

On June 29<sup>th</sup> 2021 our groups sent a Notice of Intent to Sue WVDEP, threatening a possible citizen suit against WVDEP for violating the NPDES limits it gave itself in its permit for the Greendale site.

The Notice cites some 780 violations of permit limits for pH, iron and aluminum since October 2016 (the highest number of violations of any NPDES permit in West Virginia according to the U.S.EPA's ECHO tracking system), and questions why this site isn't among the highest priorities for using funds from the Special Reclamation Water Trust Fund to treat the nearly 57 tons per year acid load documented as being discharged from the site.

The notice letter gives WVDEP 60 days to inform us of steps the agency plans on taking to correct these violations before we proceed with filing a complaint in Federal Court.

### Leave a Legacy of Hope for the Future

Remember the Highlands Conservancy in your will. Plan now to provide a wild and wonderful future for your children and future generations. Bequests keep our organization strong and will allow your voice to continue to be heard. Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life.

### Send Us a Post Card, Drop Us a Line, Stating Point Of View

Please email any poems, letters, commentaries, etc. to the VOICE editor at johnmcferrin@aol.com or by real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

**Join Now !!!**

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<b>Membership categories</b> (circle one)		Individual	Family	Org.
Senior		\$15		
Student		\$15		
Introductory		\$15		
Other		\$15		
Regular		\$25	\$35	\$50
Associate		\$50	\$75	\$100
Sustaining		\$100	\$150	\$200
Patron		\$250	\$500	\$500
Mountaineer		\$500	\$750	\$1000

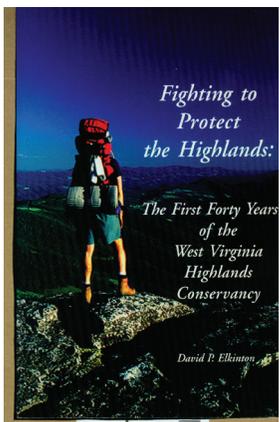
Mail to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321

**West Virginia Highlands Conservancy**  
**Working to Keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful**

You may also join on-line at [www.wvhighlands.org](http://www.wvhighlands.org)

**GET A GREAT HISTORY BOOK**

For the first time, a comprehensive history of West Virginia's most influential activist environmental organization. Author Dave Elkinton, the Conservancy's third president, and a twenty-year board member, not only traces the major issues that have occupied the Conservancy's energy, but profiles more than twenty of its volunteer leaders.



From the cover by photographer Jonathan Jessup to the 48-page index, this book will appeal both to Conservancy members and friends and to anyone interested in the story of how West Virginia's mountains have been protected against the forces of over-development, mismanagement by government, and even greed.

518 pages, 6x9, color cover, published by Pocahontas Press

To order your copy for \$15.95, plus \$3.00 shipping, visit the Conservancy's website, [wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org), where payment is accepted by credit card and PayPal. Or write: WVHC, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Proceeds support the Conservancy's ongoing environmental projects.

**Tell a Friend!**

If you have a friend you would like to invite to join the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy just fill out this form and send it to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

Person you wish to refer: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Filling out the form, etc. is, of course, the old school way of doing things. If you prefer, just email the information to Dave Saville at [WVHC50@gmail.com](mailto:WVHC50@gmail.com).

The way it works: Anyone you refer gets *The Highlands Voice* for six months. At the end of the six months, they get a letter asking if they want to join. If they join, we're happy. If not, then maybe next time.

**SUCH A DEAL!**

**Book Premium With Membership**

Although *Fighting to Protect the Highlands, the First 40 Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy* normally sells for \$15.95 plus \$3.00 postage. We are offering it as a premium to new members. New members receive it free with membership.

Existing members may have one for \$10.00. Anyone who adds \$10 to the membership dues listed on the How to Join membership or on the renewal form will receive the history book. Just note on the membership form that you wish to take advantage of this offer.

**A Big Beautiful Bountiful Book!****The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Virginia, Edited by Richard S. Bailey and Casey B. Rucker**

Reviewed by Cynthia D. Ellis

It's here! The long awaited second edition of the West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas has arrived!

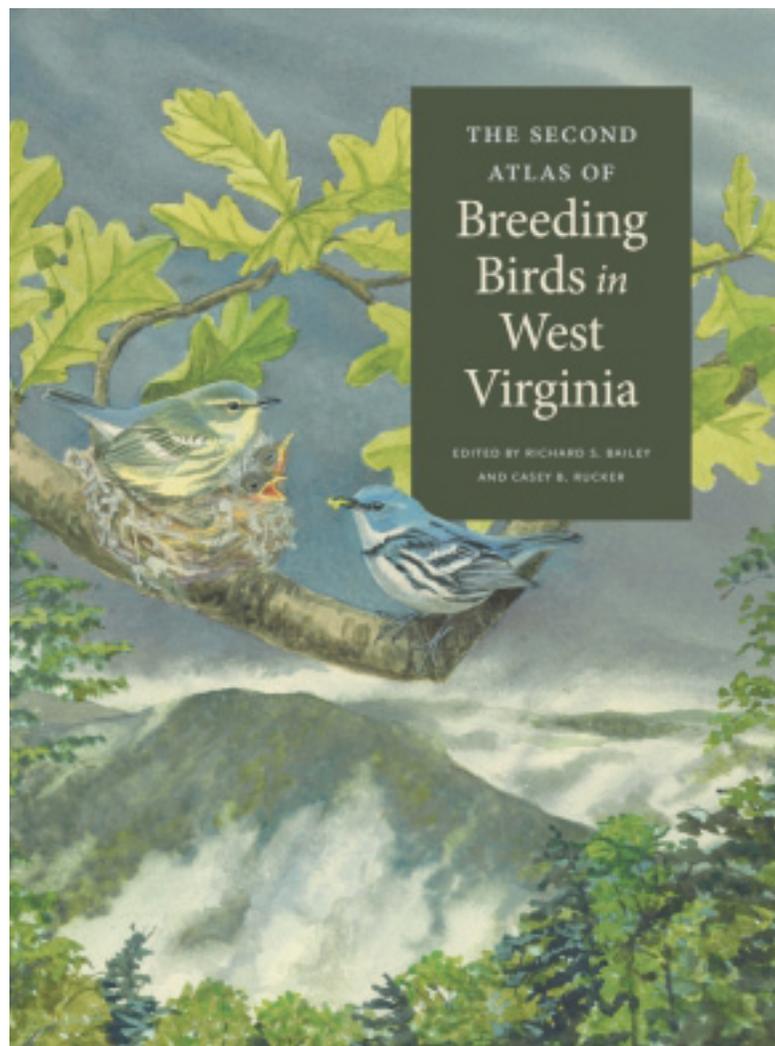
Since the first ever breeding bird atlas in the world was published in England in 1970, West Virginia birders have known they wanted to census our birds too---to survey what species nest here and in what locations.

This much anticipated book was preceded by the first WV atlas in 1994. Now the newest one has finally been published after an enormous amount of field work, writing, editing and more. "The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Virginia," weighs in at a hefty 6 ½ pounds and sports a gorgeous cover by Julie Zickefoose, famed naturalist, writer, and artist. The book's editors, Richard Bailey and Casey Rucker, made this dedication: "To the happy few who gave tremendously of their time, money, and devotion in pursuit of greater understanding of the Mountain State's beloved birdlife."

What is a breeding bird atlas? Here is what it is not. This is not a bird identification guide. This book is not meant to be tucked in a pocket or day pack and carried along on outings. Rather this is a comprehensive resource. "A breeding bird atlas is a grid-based survey used to document the status and distribution of all bird species that breed within a given country, state, or county". And with 160 species confirmed as breeding by this latest effort, it can be understood that a large volume, which required much research, would be the outcome.

**Chipping Sparrow**

Who might use the information in a bird atlas? Anyone who wishes to know about the number of species and their distribution, about rarities, and about information for a basis of an Environmental Impact Assessment [EIA]. In this book's foreword, Jay Buckelew---one of the



authors of the first atlas---said, "Breeding bird atlases provide not only a snapshot of a state or province's birdlife during a restricted period, but also a baseline to which changes in avifauna can be compared. The temperate forests of the Appalachian Mountains region stand out as a center of global biodiversity whose importance will only increase over the course of this century. It is my hope that his Atlas will augment other recent projects in nearby states in providing important information to promote the conservation of globally as well as regionally important bird populations."

Indeed, these topics are addressed in the book. The Introduction includes a bit about the "Role of the West Virginia Atlases

in Conservation Planning," and Chapter 3 is titled "Habitats in a Changing Landscape". Chapter 9 is "Bird Conservation in West Virginia," with subtopics such as History, Legislation, Abundance and Trends, Collision Hazards and Current and Future Trends.

What else can be found in this atlas? Well, there are species accounts for all of the birds confirmed as breeding here, in taxonomic order, from Canada Goose to Dickcissel. There are maps and graphs and photos which range from sublime captures of a Wood Duck and a Red-shouldered Hawk, to a depiction of Chipping Sparrows copulating and of a House Sparrow nabbing a Cheeto.

There's a well-earned tribute to our ally Brooks Bird Club and thanks for their help with both atlases. The valuable assistance of the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI)'s spruce restoration programs is noted. Joe Rieffenberger is among authors listed in "Literature Cited".

Also, this atlas includes a discussion of Climate Change, with the challenges to birds characterized as "often-severe, multiplying, and complex". However, the book concludes by looking forward to a future 3<sup>rd</sup> Atlas and by pointing out that, "West Virginia is a small state in both population and geographical extent, but its prominent position within one of the most biodiverse temperate ecosystems in the world confers a substantial responsibility to conserve the birdlife on the state's expansive forests."

Your own copy of the new atlas, or one for your favorite birder or library may be ordered through the publisher: [The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Virginia Edited by Richard S. Bailey and Casey B. Rucker \(psupress.org\)](https://psupress.org)

# Maury Johnson, Hero from the Holler

By Cynthia D. Ellis

There are many different ways of taking action to protect the West Virginia mountains. We may know of the quiet work of those who labor at their computers and phones, and then too we know of the more readily visible volunteers who help with protests, marches, and actions of every kind. Larry Gibson of Kayford Mountain was one of the latter. Maury Johnson, who battles the Mountain Valley Pipeline of Virginia and West Virginia, is a bit of both.

Like Larry and others we admire, Maury acts out of a deep love of home. And it would only take one visit to the mountains and valleys of Monroe County in southeastern West Virginia to see why.

I met Maury at a No Pipeline event in Summers County in 2017. A broad-shouldered, gregarious guy, Maury was checking in with everyone attending. He had words to offer up when speakers were called upon...and he even gave us a little glimpse of his clogging moves.

But make no mistake about his determined and serious nature. Maury has testified or been part of hearings in the West Virginia Legislature, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court and more. He is a member of the Executive Committee of POWHR [Protect Our Water Heritage Rights] and has worked closely with pipeline fighters across the nation, particularly those in the Midwest.

He writes letter after letter of public comment. In a 2017 letter to WV Congressional members and the press, he decried proceedings of the WV DEP in this way:

As one of the participants in the Federal 401 Lawsuit against WV DEP that demanded that WV DEP do its job and protect WV Citizens and its Water Resources, I am more than appalled at the actions last week of WV DEP Chief Austin Caperton and WV DEP in reinstating the Stormwater Permit without adequate review for the MVP and by giving up their authority to protect our waters through the 401 water quality permit. This is far and beyond the MVP or ACP or any pipeline, this is about whether West Virginians deserve Clean Water. You either stand up for clean water or you do not.



WV Legislative Photogra

## Maury Johnson at the West Virginia Legislature, February, 2020

Maury Johnson sometimes wears a t-shirt with the slogan, "Water Protector/Land Defender/Pipeline Fighter". He prefers the term, "Global Citizen." At any rate you can get a view of Maury in action in the short video "Hero from the Holler". You can see it at either

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMe-nrvmNTY> or <https://vimeo.com/555386858?fbclid=IwAR3-YdcCF6XOJliOnIjS-tzihSNk-EU9o-jhQUBrUQyxZ2QWEZUT3CA-PxSM>. (same video either place).

We are inspired by, and grateful for allies such as this fellow from Monroe.

## Commenting on the Mountain Valley Pipeline

Before the Mountain Valley Pipeline would be allowed to cross streams or wetlands in West Virginia, it would need a permit from the United States Corps of Engineers. It had hopes that it could qualify under what is called a Nationwide Permit. This is a one size fits all approach in which all stream or wetlands crossings. The MVP ran into difficulties with this approach (see *The Highlands Voice*, May, 2020; June, 2020; October, 2020; December, 2020; January, 2021; April, 2021). It decided to, instead, pursue individual approvals for each crossing. This is what it is doing now.

Under Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act, federal agencies cannot authorize projects in a state unless that state certifies (called a 401 Certification) that the project will not violate state water quality standards. With the Mountain Valley Pipeline, West Virginia now has to decide whether it will refuse the 401 Certification. If it does not want to refuse the 401 Certification outright, it could condition its approval on the pipeline developers taking certain steps to protect water quality.

Part of deciding whether to issue the 401 certification, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection has to ask the public what it thinks.

With the assistance of Appalachian Mountain Advocates, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has joined with several other groups to submit comments opposing making the 401 Certification. In addition, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has joined with several groups to make comments opposing the Certification. In this issue of *The Highlands Voice*, there are two pieces on the comments. The pieces by Randy Kesling (page 15) and Cindy Rank (page 5) reflect the flavor of comments submitted.

## Always

I can easily have a big whirl of being  
with the  
surge of crossed  
lanes of the stucky  
hissing whisk of afternoon tires,  
so dogged eternal

Or that reliable combusting rattle  
of compressor for the pogoing  
shattering jackhammer  
always down a street,  
down a street  
somewhere

And, yes, with  
the counterpoint -  
the afternoon busy outdoor crimson cloth  
new sweet scone,  
latte and cinnamon,  
wine twinkling  
cafes  
and the sprinkled little  
silky ethereal golden  
yellow and green  
ribboned  
botiques,  
so nice, so nice

That, too

I know

Yet were you around  
some faintly remembered  
summer hour  
when the tendrils of fog  
were still hovering over the dewy hills  
to catch the  
furtive  
cantering flight  
of the shamelessly  
white feathered  
bald eagle  
high gliding  
above a sunrising river?

That you now know  
will always, always  
rise you  
from that hard gravity  
of your  
too brick worn  
feet

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## Mon National Forest Hiking Guide

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, the new edition of the treasured guide to every trail in the Monongahela National Forest features brand-new topographic maps and Kent Mason's gorgeous photos, all in color.

The Guide has been updated with the cooperation of National Forest District Rangers and Recreation Specialists to reflect changes in the past ten years:

- \* newly designated wilderness areas
- \* new trails near campgrounds and sites of special significance
- \* a new complex of interconnected trails on Cheat Mountain
- \* rerouted and discontinued trails
- \* ratings for difficulty, scenery, access to water, and much else

The definitive guide to the Mon adds a wealth of information about history, wildlife, and botany; safety, preparation, and weather; horseback and mountain bike riding and cross-country skiing; as well as sources of further information on the Forest and its environs.

The Monongahela National Forest has long been known as a 'Special Place'. The hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing opportunities it provides are among the best in the eastern U.S. New wilderness and backcountry trails have been added to the outstanding areas we have appreciated for decades – Otter Creek Wilderness, Dolly Sods Wilderness, Flatrock Plains, Roaring Plains, Blackwater Canyon, Spruce Knob, North Fork Mountain, Shaver's Mountain, Laurel Fork Wilderness, Cranberry Wilderness -- and there are lesser-known gems to be found in between.

Profits from the sale of these guides support a wide variety of worthy environmental projects for the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

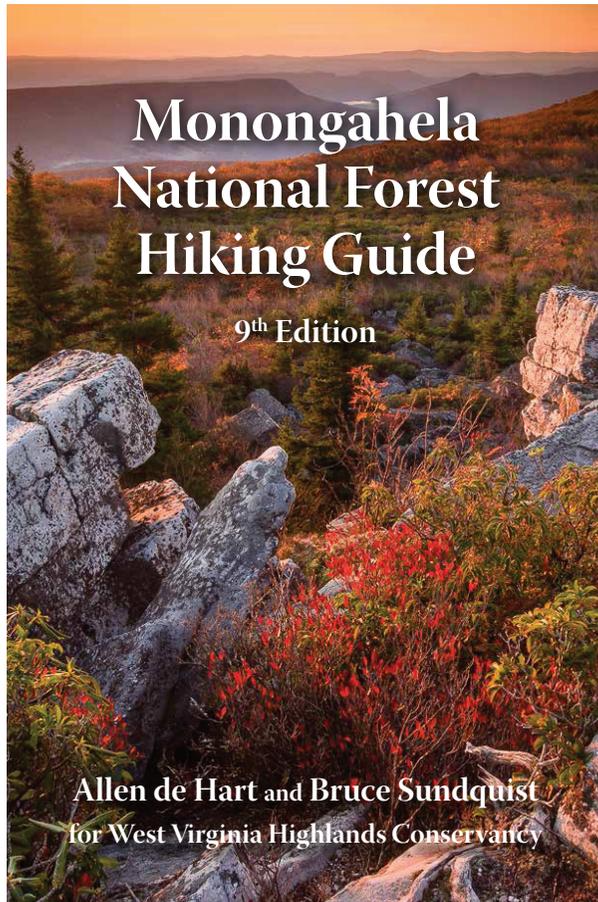
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### The Highlands Voice: It's Not Just for Reading Any More

*The Highlands Voice* is the main way that the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy communicates with its members. But we would like to communicate with more than our members. We have a valuable perspective and information; we would like to communicate with everybody. We still offer electronic delivery. If you would prefer to receive it electronically instead of the paper copy please contact Dave Saville at [WVHC50@gmail.com](mailto:WVHC50@gmail.com). With electronic delivery, you will receive a link to a pdf of the Voice several days before the paper copy would have arrived.

No matter how you receive it, please pass it along. If electronically, share the link. If paper, hand it off to a friend, leave it around the house, leave it around the workplace. It's not just for reading. It's for reading and passing along.

### BUMPER STICKERS

To get free *I ♥ Mountains* bumper sticker(s), send a SASE to P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Slip a dollar donation (or more) in with the SASE and get 2 bumper stickers. Businesses or organizations wishing to provide bumper stickers to their customers/members may have them free. (Of course if they can afford a donation that will be gratefully accepted.)



# Walking-Wisdoms

By Hugh Rogers

Less heartforlongwalks, more thoughts of walks taken. Some short quotes at the end of Duncan Minshull's anthology, *Beneath My Feet: Writers on Walking*, have tickled my memory. They might do the same for you.

It is good to collect things, but better to go on walks.

--Anatole France

Highlands Conservancy-sponsored outings have combined walks and collecting, in the sense of finding, identifying, photographing ("take only pictures, leave only footprints"). I recall one on the Mylius Trail, the short steep access to Otter Creek Wilderness from the Glady Fork. Our guide was an enthusiastic botanist who found plants to expound on, it seemed, every few feet. Late in the day, his eyes widened at a lush green spot where the trail crossed a trickle. Bringing us all together, he pointed out a globally-rare monkshood. It was a perfect climax, and time to turn around. Did anyone else feel a twinge of disappointment that the day had gone by and we were less than halfway up the mountain?

You don't have to do anything to teach your child to walk.

--Dr. Benjamin Spock

Babies just want to get on their feet. Those who grow up in the mountains generally want to climb rocks and follow trails.

As our sons were going off to college, we took father-son hikes. Ian wanted someplace foreign, so we went to Quebec. Tom was going to school in New England, so we hiked in New Hampshire's Presidential Range. By Gabriel's turn, nine years later, I wasn't much of a backpacker. Our plan was to find spots for base camps and day-hike from there. We headed south, because we had a family errand in North Carolina. Our hikes, though, were in Virginia.

Ramsey's Draft Wilderness is off US 250 on the east side of Shenandoah Mountain, 20 miles west of Staunton. Like Otter Creek Wilderness, it contains a headwater's entire watershed—but pressed into one-third the area, with greater elevation changes. Loops from the stream up the mountain and back suited me, though most people haul their packs around the circling ridge.

After the detour to Winston-Salem, we headed northwest to Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest peak (5729'). Grayson Highlands

State Park is the nearest motor access to the mountain and Lewis Fork Wilderness. As Ramsey's Draft had reminded me of Otter Creek, these highlands, in some respects, reminded me of Dolly Sods. The wide meadows were sprinkled with red spruce; the plentiful blueberries were ripe. The park required reservations and fees for backpackers' overnight parking, a regulation that may come to the Sods.

The Appalachian Trail passes within half a mile of Mt. Rogers. The rounded peak doesn't offer views—it's topped with Fraser fir, which only grows in the highest elevations of the Southern Appalachians. I had seen how the woolly adelgid nearly eliminated it on Mt. Mitchell in North Carolina. The fir on Mt. Rogers hadn't suffered those impacts, yet it remained an endangered species. The threat now is climate change.

Most of our walking there, twenty years ago this August, was in open country, on top of the world. Well-worn AT hikers, as they passed, invariably muttered, "Howyadoin'." We replied, "Blissed out. You?"

She walks in beauty, like the night.

--Lord Byron

And she walks in beauty *in* the night. In the final summer of the 70's, Ruth invited her women friends to a potluck/event that featured a ritual walk through the woods to Moon Run. Quite a few people came. Many hadn't been here before, and Ruth worried that they would lose their way in the night woods. She recruited me as a guide. I pointed the way and offered encouragement or a helping arm as they came along, one by one. Some, I know, appreciated my role as the only male. Afterwards, what they talked about most, and a couple of them painted, was skinny-dipping under the full moon. I wasn't invited for that. But I did get dinner.

"*Sehnsucht*"—the passion for what is ever beyond.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

Google Translate offers different meanings for this German word: nostalgia, longing, yearning. Those versions sound closer to the Portuguese "*saudade*," which can imply nostalgia for a specific place. Stevenson's romantic translation points toward the future, to the place not yet reached. It's a younger person's view, and he was a young man when he wrote

a wonderful memoir of walking, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. Nostalgia, though, is more likely to affect the elderly.

Although I have never set out on a walk with a donkey or other animal, I have gained some on the way. One lost bear-hunting dog stuck to me all along Otter Creek Trail and up to Big Springs Gap, where its owner saw me coming. He thanked me profusely until he noticed I wasn't so delighted. That was unkind of me. I could have expressed my relief, at least: no more stumbling over a hound who had to be reassured that I wouldn't abandon him. It wasn't his fault that he could be sent out year-round to go stupid in the woods.

A walk is always filled with significant phenomena.

--Robert Walser

It feels like cheating to cite a walk on the upper South Prong Trail and its informal extensions. Significant phenomena? Rocks, moss, and sheltering spruce, arranged for contemplation (see the photo on p. 115 of the Hiking Guide); bogs and views off both sides of the Plains, more compelling the farther you go.

Once, years ago, I went too far, and knew I couldn't get back to my car before dark. Especially if I couldn't find the trail. In the brush, every direction I looked, looked the same. Every trail was a phantom. Until, suddenly, I spotted a significant phenomenon: a communication tower.

The tower just off the pipeline had been some distance behind me, but now it was on the wrong side. Somehow, I had turned around. Or had I? I kept puzzling over how it had appeared out of nowhere—I



(More on the next page)

# Wheeling University Remembers Ben Stout

By Cindy Rank

For those who knew Ben Stout, or worked with him, or heard about him, or read some of his research or court testimonies about the value of headwater streams and healthy water, here's a bit of happy news – something we can all use these days.

On June 18<sup>th</sup> family and friends gathered at one of Ben's favorite spots along

Wheeling Creek near Wheeling University where Ben taught for many years, engaging and entertaining students in class as well as out in the field sampling streams, identifying bugs, and explaining the connections between healthy waters and a healthy world.

Ben's sister Nancy noted that it was one of his students, Jacob Keeney, who

suggested it might be nice to honor Ben by developing a reflection area on campus in his honor. "A peaceful place where faculty staff and students could come when they just needed some time and space to reflect." - Ben would love this spot.

## REFLECTION AREA

### In Honor of Dr. Benjamin M. Stout III, 1957 – 2018

Professor of Biology and Stream Ecologist, Wheeling Jesuit University 1992 - 2018

This area, by Wheeling Creek, was one of Dr. Stout's favorite campus places, meeting here with his students for hands-on ecology classes and inspiration; one student suggested it is an ideal place to reflect.

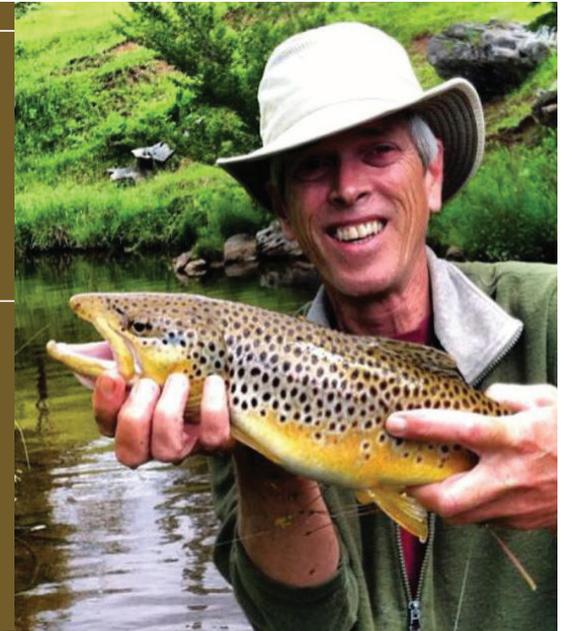
Ben loved West Virginia, its mountains and streams, and sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm for the environment and clean water with his students. And he loved to fish.

He had an undying passion for preserving the environment and water quality. A leader in his specialty of freshwater streams science, he described his career-long goal as "to bring the voice of science to the people."

Ben stressed the importance of analyzing the adverse environmental effects of industry, and bringing these to public attention. With a strong belief in community-based collaborative research, he felt it his professional responsibility to provide citizens with factual, scientific information to aid public involvement in attaining clean water and safe public water systems. "That is my role, to make sure people have good information and to fight off disinformation."

**"As I look back on a career as a stream ecologist, I have relished the challenge of discovery and helping underserved people to meet their number one requirement: freshwater."**

"Ben's enthusiasm for life, and his love of our fresh water resources and all the critters who live in these streams, invigorated and inspired all who knew him. He gave unselfishly of his time, energy, knowledge and skills to protect the environment and the goodness of the world around us." (Cindy Rank, *West Virginia Highlands Conservancy*)



"My advice for younger scientists, particularly graduate students, is to start small with your writing. Work with your professors to develop and submit a small grant. Don't be discouraged if you don't win an award the first time around. Keep going! Win a small award and do that work plus something value-added. Always do a little more than what your granting agencies expects. Go the extra mile and get a reputation for it." (*Society for Freshwater Science, 2017.*)

## And the Walking Wisdom Just Keeps on Coming (Continued-from previous page)

I am nearsighted, too closely focused, but still. And I could see it so clearly. Across a gap, where night had settled already. My tired brain suspected that the gap was one significance of this phenomenon, part of why it was where I thought it shouldn't be. Like most people do when they're tired and lost, I argued with myself and denied the evidence of the compass. At last, Ah! I was looking at the Green Knob tower, not the one on the Plains. And I was farther south and east than I had realized.

Much later, I saw the lights were on at Jack Teter's farm, so I stopped to call Ruth. I hadn't met Jack but I'd served on a civic board with his wife, Dorles. When he came to the door, I introduced myself and told him I'd gotten lost up on the Plains. He said, "Lots of people do."

I have two doctors, my left leg and my right.  
--George Trevelyan

St. Augustine put it this way: *Solvitur ambulando*, It is solved by walking. Whether

the problem is mental, physical, social, philosophical, it's good to consult these doctors. And remember that limited mobility is not immobility.



# Conservation Hub Takes Flight

By Dan Shaffer

In August of last year, shortly after the cancellation of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA) announced the launch of a new program: the Conservation Hub. Building on the experience and success of the Compliance Surveillance Initiative, or CSI, a monitoring and enforcement program that targeted the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, the Conservation Hub is a regional information and mapping portal focused on the Central Appalachian Highlands region of West Virginia and Virginia.

The Conservation Hub will become a major initiative for the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance in the future. The Hub program's objective is to promote responsible resource management by providing data-focused tools that enhance a project's transparency, strengthen its accountability to permitting and regulatory agencies and facilitate public participation in the evaluation process. The program is designed to significantly enhance the capabilities of environmental, conservation and citizen groups to assess impacts of projects in the greater Central Appalachian Highlands region and to help assure that the overall environmental integrity of the region is maintained.

With the Hub, ABRA provides a set of tools that will give conservation groups, the general public, and even regulatory agencies an unprecedented look at the scale and scope of development and land management projects. The Conservation Hub provides a one-stop-shop for environmental and regulatory data, a platform for analysis and messaging and thus a means of levelling the playing field for those focused on conservation. Our goal is to enable those actors to participate in the process of ensuring that projects are reasonable, equitable and sustainable, wherever possible.

Conservation Hub's geographic area of interest covers what has been termed the Central Appalachian Highlands, in West Virginia and Virginia. The specific focus area consists of 26 counties in West Virginia and 26 counties in Virginia. Projects outside of the focus area will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Like the CSI Program, the Conservation Hub is built around online maps and data. The Hub also leans heavily on the work of both federal and state agencies and regulators, who provide a

wealth of geographic data to the public.

Over the last ten months, the Conservation Hub has made significant progress, both visibly and behind the scenes. The initial four projects have expanded to seven, covering issues ranging from opposition to gold mining in Buckingham County, VA to forest land management practices in the Monongahela National Forest. One supports efforts to create a Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area in Virginia. Another describes risks to the survival of the endangered Candy Darter, a colorful fish under threat in WV and VA. Four more projects are in development and one existing project may be expanded to address an emerging threat to the northern Shenandoah Valley. Over the coming months additional changes will occur:

- Some cosmetic changes to the Hub site, its project web pages and project related online maps.
- New tools will be made available, such as a site-wide, searchable data catalog, that will aid the use of the online maps; the ability to utilize crowd-sourced data, such as that from water monitoring programs.
- The launch of the National Forest Integrity Project (NFIP) 3

A significant new portion of the Conservation Hub, the National Forest Integrity Project is a monitoring program created to track proposed and ongoing projects in the three National Forests that are located within the Central Appalachian Highlands (Monongahela in West Virginia and George Washington and Jefferson in Virginia). These three National Forests are defining components of the Central Appalachian Highlands region. Information about National Forest Service projects is often not readily available to the public and, indeed, sometimes is withheld by the agency.

The National Forest Integrity Project will be the first effort of its kind in the nation to monitor Forest Service projects. It is a much-needed program that will enhance public understanding of projects that affect not only the forests but the land and communities surrounding them. Also, the NFIP will be instrumental in identifying National Forest Service projects that might compromise the critical role that the National Forests have in carbon sequestration, an

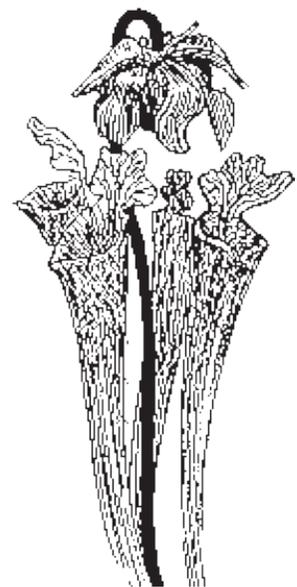
important part of fighting climate change. Two United States Forest Service projects are currently active on the Hub. Several more will come online in the next few weeks, prior to the launch of the NFIP.

The Conservation Hub has already proven useful to project sponsors in affecting change. A Hub page and online map aided ABRA-affiliated groups opposing a prospective Gold Mine in Buckingham County, VA. These groups succeeded in securing legislation requiring the study of industrial-scale gold mining in Virginia and whether it can be done safely and legally. Two Forest Service projects have been delayed for unspecified reasons after repeated requests for data and transparency by hub project sponsors.

For those of you who have already seen and used the Hub, please note that its web address has recently changed. The new URL is: <https://conservation-abra.hub.arcgis.com/>

Any bookmarks you may have will need to be replaced or updated. Otherwise, everything should function as it did before.

Those with concerns about additional Forest Service projects and other development activities are welcomed to request their inclusion on the Hub or the NFIP. Decisions regarding project development and inclusion are made by an Advisory Committee that meets monthly. For more information on the Conservation Hub, or the National Forest Integrity Project, please contact Dan Shaffer [dshaffer@abralliance.org](mailto:dshaffer@abralliance.org).



## Mountain Valley Pipeline Poses Threats to Trout Streams

By Randy Kesling

A saying among anglers is that trout don't live in ugly places – a nice reminder of what we love about West Virginia and the cold, clear, clean, fishable waters of our mountain home. WV has but one native trout species, the brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) which is designated as WV's official fish. These trout, sporting beautiful dark green flanks spotted with yellow and red, can be seen feeding on insects and small fish in the clear waters of wilder parts of the eastern third of the mountain state. Fly fishermen will tell you that the brook trout is cunning and wary, and that bringing one of these beautiful fish to hand with a fly rod is a true delight. For me and many of my fly fishing friends, the joy of catching a brook trout is topped off by releasing it, unharmed, back to the wild.

But make no mistake, native brook trout populations are fragile. A continuous stream flow of cold, clear, highly oxygenated water is critical to the survival and health of these fish. Sedimentation of streams resulting from construction activities, such as road building and pipeline crossings, presents a major threat to native fish populations. Unchecked sedimentation of brook trout streams can harm fish by clogging gills, smothering spawning beds, suffocating eggs, and choking off insect life on which fish feed.

Many brook trout streams lie in the path of the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) route. The West Virginia State Council of Trout Unlimited, is concerned that our native brook trout populations are made more vulnerable as a result of the construction of the MVP. Brook trout live and spawn in the small, cold headwaters and tributaries of the Elk, Greenbrier and Gauley rivers, all of which will be crossed many times by the MVP. Each stream crossings represents a very real threat to native trout populations in those streams. Digging trenches across or boring tunnels underneath the trout streams crossed by the MVP increase the risk of sedimentation events that can damage or extirpate brook trout populations in those waters.

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) has cited MVP pipeline constructors hundreds of times for releasing sediment into water bodies in violation of water pollution rules resulting in over two million dollars in fines. A large numbers of MVP's planned water-crossings have yet to be completed. MVP's record of fines and violations on its work to-date reflect an inability of MVP to safely protect our streams. This should be a serious red flag for a pipeline which has so many crossings on sensitive brook trout streams ahead of it.

The WVDEP must continue to focus on improved performance of MVP construction activities. MVP's history of violations calls for more critical analysis of MVP permits and lower thresholds for denying or revoking them. MVP's poor performance history would

justify enhanced erosion control measures, increasing oversight of MVP's construction and operations, and levying penalties and fines for failure to protect our waters. The WV Legislature must ensure that the WVDEP has adequate funding and resources to fulfill its responsibility to protect the waters of the Mountain State.

Several energy-based mega corporations have recently shifted emphasis away from a decades-long focus on fossil fuels and towards renewable energy sources. The mounting challenge of climate change resulting from the use of fossil fuels, calls to question the wisdom of pursuing increasingly archaic, environmentally injurious endeavors such as the MVP. As we await more enlightened thinking and action on these matters, we cannot hesitate today to protect our precious WV waters, and the fishy, native denizens that inhabit them.

Protecting the quality of our essential and abundant mountain waters, requires vigilance and voice from many individuals and organizations. The stakes are high, and every citizen has a lot to lose if the water quality of the state's rivers and streams is allowed to deteriorate. This is one of the top concerns for the WV Council of Trout Unlimited, and we count ourselves fortunate to have organizations such as the WV Rivers Coalition, The WV Highlands Conservancy, the WV Environmental Council, and others who share our concerns advocate for the protection of West Virginia Streams and Rivers.

If you are concerned about MVP's impacts on trout streams, submit comments to [WQScComments@wv.gov](mailto:WQScComments@wv.gov) by **June 22**.

**Note: This previously appeared in *The Charleston Gazette*.**



# HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY BOUTIQUE



- ▶ The baby shirts are certified organic cotton and are offered in one infant and several toddler sizes and an infant onesie. Slogan is "I ♥ Mountains Save One for Me!" Onesie [18 mo.]---\$25, Infant tee [18 mo.]---\$20, Toddler tee, 2T,3T,4T, 5/6---\$20
- ▶ Soft pima cotton adult polo shirts are a handsome earthtone light brown and feature the spruce tree logo. Sizes M-XL [Shirts run large for stated size.] \$ 25.00, 2XL \$26.50

To order by mail [WV residents add 6 % sales tax] make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Online Store, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306

**The same items are also available at our on-line store: [www.wvhighlands.org](http://www.wvhighlands.org)**

## T- SHIRTS

White, heavy cotton T-shirts with the **I ♥ Mountains** slogan on the front. The lettering is blue and the heart is red. "West Virginia Highlands Conservancy" in smaller blue letters is included below the slogan. Short sleeve in sizes: S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Long sleeve in sizes S, M, L, and XL. **Short sleeve** model is \$18 by mail; **long sleeve** is \$22. West Virginia residents add 6% sales tax. Send sizes wanted and check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy  
ATTEN: Online Store, WVHC, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306.



## HATS FOR SALE

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

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

The I ♥ Mountains The colors are stone, black and red.. The front of the cap has I ♥ MOUNTAINS. The heart is red. The red and black hats are soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure. The stone has a stiff front crown with a velcro strap on the back. All hats have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy printed on the back. Cost is \$20 by mail. West Virginia residents add 6% tax. Make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Atten: Online Store, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306