



The Highlands Voice

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Mountain Valley Pipeline Safety Issues Continue

By Dan Radmacher

On an early spring evening, dozens of residents impacted by construction of Mountain Valley Pipeline showed up at Bent Mountain Center in Virginia. A long-needed meeting with representatives from the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration finally came together after months of failed attempts and cancellations.

It was the first chance many had to speak directly with state or federal regulators about their longstanding concerns over the pipeline's construction and the dangers it could pose once operational.

And they had a lot to say.



PHMSA Deputy Administrator Tristan Brown (foreground) listens to Georgia Haverty, a Giles County landowner (center), during a Bent Mountain community meeting on March 13. Photo by Dan Radmacher

Some brought photographs of problems with pipeline installation — lack of supports for the pipeline in the trench, rocky outcroppings that could pierce the pipe if the ground beneath the trench should shift, and more. Others talked about dangers posed by the steep grades, sharp turns, fragile karst topography and potential seismic activity.

“I’m proud of the community and how we showed up and made clear how much we know,” says Russell Chisholm, managing director of the Protect Our Water, Heritage Rights Coalition. “There’s still some lingering frustration

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Thoughts From Our Vice President

By Luanne McGovern

I just returned from a wonderful two-week trip to Ireland, the Emerald Isle. I have to say, though, that West Virginia in May is even greener than Ireland! Being in Ireland made me think a lot about the similarities and differences between our two countries since so many of us can trace our roots back to that country, and many of our ancestors came to West Virginia in search of a (hopefully) better life. Unfortunately, many found their way to the coal mines, living a tough life to provide for their families and future generations. That struggle continues today in so much of the coalfields, as coal companies keep promising prosperity, but deliver only devastation to the people and the land.

Every inch of the land in Ireland has been settled, farmed, and fought over for millennia. The concept of public lands is very new in Ireland and consists of only about 1 percent of the total land mass. I contrast that with our beautiful public lands here in the United States that are being protected and preserved for future generations, with over 840 million acres, or about 35 percent of our land mass. This is the fight that the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has been engaged in for over 50 years, especially here in the Highlands, where you can find some of the most unique and beautiful lands anywhere. I think Chimney Top on North Fork Mountain and Bear Rocks Preserve are every bit as beautiful as the Cliffs of Moher.

Another observation was the lack of single-use plastic everywhere I went in Ireland. In hotels, restaurants, and

stores – it was very rare to see any single-use plastic bottles, bags, or wrapping. Sustainability seemed to be at the forefront of the mind throughout the country. I contrast that with the proliferation of plastic in the US, a huge problem that keeps getting bigger. The increase in fracking of natural gas is a direct cause of this increase in plastic use, as energy and chemical companies are finding ways to convert natural gas to high-value products. It is a struggle to avoid single-use plastic in our daily lives, but as Ireland shows, it can be done.

While I was vacationing in Ireland, the WVHC team has been hard at work.

- Our team sponsored and tabled at the 30th annual Cheat River Festival, engaging with over 100 individuals over the two days, and had a great time doing it.
- WVHC staff, board members and volunteers joined a gathering of more than 15 industry stakeholders and experts to discuss several topics related to West Virginia Public Lands. Discussions surrounded wildlife corridors, current forestry activities and trail development efforts throughout the state.
- The first Mountain Odyssey outing was held on Mother's Day with a bird walk at Blackwater Falls State Park led by Casey Rucker. We have many more outings planned for this summer. We hope to see you out there.
- The Dolly Sods Wilderness Stew-

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Signing up to receive emails from the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is your gateway to staying actively engaged in conservation efforts and volunteer opportunities in West Virginia.

Staying informed with our action alerts will empower you to advocate for environmental policies that matter the most.

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ards held the Trailhead Stewards training and annual picnic on May 18 at Seneca Rocks Discovery Center. Nine new people were trained as Trailhead Stewards.

- At the annual Wilderness Stewards picnic, the following people were recognized for their contribution of at least 40 hours in volunteer time during 2023: Tammie Smith, Frank O'Hara, Judy O'Hara, David Mong, Marjorie McDiarmid, William Ross, Chris Longe, John Hedges, Jay Lietzow, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Elizabeth Olmo, Ben Wiles, Haley Hoffman and Keren Hedges. Each was given a Hydroflask tumbler with the WVHC logo, and a gift card for REI. WVHC is very thankful to these individuals for their time and commitment to stewarding Dolly Sods Wilderness Area.
- WVHC joined Friends of Cheat, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, and the Tygart Valley Watershed Associ-

ation for a day on the water, learning and playing with 5th-grade students from Beverly Elementary School. During this day, WVHC helped educate students about BMIs, how to use tools to sample and identify them, and what that means for water quality. There were discussions with students regarding how they can be stewards of improved water quality and get more involved with protecting the environment.

Did you get a chance to see the Aurora Borealis on the night of May 10? The entire island of Ireland was blessed with clear skies and I got the chance to see and photograph the northern lights for the very first time. Other photos from West Virginia and across the country were simply amazing. It's wonderful to see that something in nature can still bring awe and delight to millions of people. Slainte!

THE WAY THE VOICE WORKS

The Highlands Voice is the official publication of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. While it is the official publication, every story in it does not represent an official position of the Conservancy. While all of our members share the general goal "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," our members often have differing views upon the best way to do that.

As a result, stories in The Voice often reflect different points of view. The Conservancy itself, however, only speaks through its Board. The only stories that reflect the official policies of the Conservancy are those reporting Board actions, including litigation positions we have taken, comments on proposed regulations, etc.

June Update from Go North Corridor H Alliance

“21st century economic development is based on what we already have ... don't give away the store.” (Edward T. McMahon)

The source for much of this update came from *The Secrets of Successful Small Communities* by Edward T. McMahon. Former president of Scenic America, McMahon, now holds the Charles E. Fraser Chair on Sustainable Development and Environmental Policy at the Urban Land Institute, Washington DC.

While waiting for the next step in the NEPA process—the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which was supposed to be issued in May—we decided to look at the bigger picture here on the mountaintop and discuss the value of what we already have. We are very fortunate to live in a beautiful place on Earth where we can still step out our doors and find solace in nature.

And our thriving, sustainable economy is based on this proximity to open space, our assets: scenic beauty, rivers, falls, parks, mountain trails, outdoor wilderness, recreational areas, historic character, natural surroundings, dark night skies, world-class scenery, abundant wildlife, and outdoor recreation resources.

What's important for economic development now is much different than it used to be. The old economy—logging and coal—was based on digging out, cutting down, and paving over, and the most important infrastructure investment was roads. Our new economy is driven by many little things—our outdoor resources, homegrown businesses, quality of life, small-town feel, connectedness, music, and art—not just one big company or one big highway.

How do we protect our assets? How do we keep our mountaintop from turning into “anywhere?” According to McMahon, “If not careful, towns can turn into a faceless place, cookie-cutter, that young people flee and tourists avoid.”

Successful small communities have succeeded by:

- paying attention to aesthetics
- protecting and enhancing scenic views, historic buildings, and unique characteristics
- supporting construction projects that fit into the existing community
- paying attention to where development goes and how it is arranged
- encouraging policies that promote walking, biking
- preserving open space, protecting air and water quality

“Successful communities have high expectations; they know what they've got and the economic value. Communities that do not say NO to bad development will get the worst of everything—low standards or no standards, the community will sink to the bottom.”

Bend, Oregon, is a good example of a community that developed a new economy by promoting what they had. Bend is where the spotted owl resided and, upon protection of that species' habitat, the logging industry in Bend saw a major downturn. That was also when the new economic shift was happening in Oregon. The town's economy rebounded to a point many times stronger than it was with logging—by promoting their natural environment and outdoor life: “If your business is in Bend, you can be on vacation at 5 p.m. every day.”

A highway splitting the towns of Thomas and Davis runs the risk of turning our mountaintop into “anywhere.” If not carefully executed and planned, infrastructure associated with Corridor H could bring a sea of strip malls and big box stores to our quiet small-town atmosphere; the antithesis of what draws residents and tourists to our beautiful highlands.

We invite you to learn more

and join the campaign at go-northcorridorh.org

Take Action!

Local community members and businesses are insisting that policy-makers mandate an alternative northern route -- one that would safeguard

river health and enhance the heritage, character, and economies of local communities.

Please join us in protecting the Blackwater River and urge the Federal Highway Administration to mandate an alternate Northern route by visiting <https://bit.ly/3JmbNE0>

What's Going On in the South Fork of the Cherry River?

By Andrew Young

The South Fork Deep Mine No. 2 is up for its sixth Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) permit renewal. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is opposed to any SMCRA permit renewals or new permits in critical habitat for the endangered candy darter, and particularly to a company like South Fork Coal Company with tens of thousands of dollars in delinquent fines and dozens of chronic, ongoing water quality based permit violations across their facilities in this area.

This deep mine complex is sealed and abandoned, but South Fork Coal Company has not been released from its bond on the permit. The deep mine permit area has been reclaimed, and all disturbed and reclaimed areas still flow through a sediment control structure. Chemically treated water continues to flow through the action area and then on to critical habitat for the endangered candy darter. There is no mining of coal on this site and there has not been for quite some time. Despite the lack of deep mining carried out under the permit, there is plenty to be suspicious of.

A curiosity with the South Fork Deep Mine No. 2 is that the permit action area is adjacent to and overlapping with the Monongahela National Forest, and the deep mine complex goes extensively underneath the National Forest. When FOIA'd, the Forest Service said they had no records related to this deep mine, despite it being around since the

1990's, nor any records connected to South Fork Coal Company's near decade of unpermitted commercial use of two Forest Service Roads (coincidentally the same two roads at the center of our ongoing lawsuit against the USFS) to support the coal operation.

That the Forest Service was not even provided notice about the mine is un-neighborly at best. Still, the lack of a commercial road use permit here has thrown up a serious red flag about both Department of Environmental Protection's ability to ensure their SMCRA permits are compliant with all permitting requirements, as well as the Monongahela National Forest's ability to conduct oversight on their own lands they are charged with managing in the public interest. This is important here because the Forest Service has previously acknowledged that toxic mine drainage is impairing Bear Run, but they have not specifically narrowed the responsible party to the South Fork Deep Mine because apparently, they didn't know it existed! It is almost so unbelievable and tenuous a position to be comical.

Rest assured, we will get to the bottom of this one way or another, and we may need to ask for your help in elevating this issue. Clean water and healthy public lands are our birthright as Americans, King Coal and captive regulators be damned. We will save what is ours or die trying; I look forward to seeing you comrades in the trenches and on the

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

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- Black 50th Anniversary T-Shirt with "Celebrating 50 years" logo. Available in Small-XXL: \$20.00
- I Love Mountains T-Shirt Short Sleeve. Available in M-XXL: \$18.00
- I Love Mountains T-Shirt Long Sleeve. Available in S, M, L, XL: \$22.00
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Please include \$5.50 shipping for Apparel items

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- I Love Mountains Bumper Sticker: \$3.00 for one, \$12.00 for 20

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- Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide, 9th Edition: \$21.95 + \$4.87 shipping

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Finally, New Federal PFAS Rules are Issued

By Luanne McGovern

If you ever needed another reason to be glad that Joe Biden is President – it is the new federal rules around PFAS (Per and Polyfluoroalkyl substances). Most of you will know that these “forever chemicals” have been showing up in our drinking water and even our bodies, leading to long-term health risks. The movie “Dark Waters” tells the horrific story of how DuPont contaminated the entire Parkersburg area with PFAS chemicals for years and kept the health impacts a secret from employees, neighbors, and the general public.

After years of foot-dragging, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has finally issued legally enforceable Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for six PFAS compounds in drinking water. The MCLs range from 4.0 parts per trillion (ppt) to 10 ppt. The timeline for implementation requires all public water systems to complete initial monitoring by 2027 and provide the information to the public. Corrective actions to reduce PFAS levels must be implemented by 2029.

To address the root causes of PFAS contamination, all companies that manufacture or use specific PFAS chemicals will be subject to EPA review and Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) reporting requirements. In addition, the EPA finalized a rule that prevents companies from starting or resuming the manufacture or processing of 329 PFAS without a complete EPA review and risk determination. Hopefully these and other new rules will bring better transparency and understanding of how and where PFAS materials are being produced and used.

What has West Virginia been doing?

In February 2020, the West Virginia Legislature initiated a plan to sample PFAS in all community water systems in West Virginia. The study, released in July 2022, tested pre-treatment water at 279 public water systems across the state, and at least one PFAS was detected at 67 water systems. You

can view the study here: <https://on.doi.gov/4c28cIF>

It is important to realize that PFAS contamination is not limited to industrial areas or large cities. Detectable levels of PFAS chemicals have been found in the untreated drinking water of Davis, Elkins, Kingwood, Hurricane, and Phillippi, to name a few.

In 2023, the WV Legislature overwhelmingly passed HB3189–The PFAS Protection Act. The bill has multiple requirements to be undertaken by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, including:

- Write a PFAS action plan to identify and address sources of PFAS for each of the 37 raw water sources that exceeded health advisory limits in force at that time (by July 1, 2024).
- Initiate a study to sample the finished water of the associated public water systems after treatment (by December 31, 2023).
- Provide information to the public in sampling results, the Department of Environmental Protection’s schedule for developing any action plans, a summary of results from any completed PFAS action plan, information about how to obtain any completed PFAS action plan, and contact information for an appropriate person or office at the Department of Environmental Protection to which questions can be directed.
- In addition, the Bill outlined multiple requirements for self-reporting PFAS manufacture and use, monitoring PFAS discharges, and establishing PFAS water quality criteria.

In May 2023, the West Virginia Division of Health and Human Resources released their testing results for finished water from the 37 sources previously identified as containing high levels of PFAS. Of those, 19 public water systems have shown detectable levels of select PFAS compounds in their finished drinking water that are above the new EPA standards. Most of the high-

est levels of contamination have been found along the Ohio River (Parkersburg, Williamstown, St, Marys, (for example).

A working group has been formed to “to evaluate treatment processes and best approaches to removing these compounds from finished water, as well as identify funding options to minimize the burden on customers.” The EPA also announced that \$18,914,000 from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will go to West Virginia to address emerging contaminants like PFAS in drinking water. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection has prioritized plans in 2024 to address issues at some of the most severely contaminated water systems (Glen Dale, Lubeck, Claywood, and Parkersburg).

Sadly, at the same time, the Department of Environmental Protection is considering approving a new permit for PFAS discharges from the Chemours Washington Works plant into the already highly contaminated Ohio River. This is the same plant that is the subject of the “Dark Waters” movie. You can comment on this permit here: <https://bit.ly/3Vl3uJG>

What can you do to reduce your exposure to PFAS?

- Check with your local water system and understand what has been

done to monitor for PFAS. Investigate how your public drinking water system is following up per the requirements in HB3189. If your drinking water shows any PFAS contamination, you should seriously consider an alternate source

- Minimize your use and purchase of commercial products that could contain PFAS chemicals. Most “non-stick” cookware still contains some type of PFAS. The waterproof jackets and boots that we all love–still contain some PFAS. Carpets and upholstery that are marketed as “stain resistant” – PFAS. Luckily, many manufacturers (such as Keen and Patagonia) have taken the PFAS danger seriously and have removed these chemicals from their products. See this article in Outdoor Magazine: <https://bit.ly/3yzSMg2>
- Minimize your purchase of fast food. Many containers contain PFAS to prevent grease and liquids from leaking out. Opt for glass and stainless-steel containers whenever possible to store food.
- Check out this article from the EPA: <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/meaningful-and-achievable-steps-you-can-take-reduce-your-risk>

Editor’s Note: See also Luanne’s December 2022 Highlands Voice article about PFAS: <https://bit.ly/4eeu71d>

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 for years to come.

Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life in the mountains. Contact crys.bauer@wvhighlands.org

Cheat Fest: A Celebration of West Virginia Community, Camaraderie, and Conservation Efforts

By Crys Bauer

Early in May, staff and board members from the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) had the pleasure of tabling at the 30th annual Cheat River Festival. Along with several other non-profits focused on West Virginia conservation and preservation, the Conservancy had a great time catching up with old friends, meeting new friends, and celebrating the successes of our partner and host of the event, Friends of the Cheat (FOC).

While I have been attending Cheat Fest for many years, this was my first experience spending time in one spot with a sole focus on connecting with festival goers and spreading the word about the Conservancy and everything we are doing to protect West Virginia's wild and wonderful charm.

I am always excited for every opportunity to get out into the public (and out from behind the computer) and meet members of the Conservancy, but being provided the privilege of blending my professional and personal world at an event that I hold so near and dear to me brought into perspective how much overlap there is in my passion for the local communities and for the watersheds and mountains of West Virginia.

For those who don't know, I began traveling to the Mountain State when I started raft guiding on the Shenandoah River almost 18 years ago. After a handful of training trips, it didn't take long before I utterly abandoned the life I once knew in Maryland and moved full-time to West Virginia. I didn't know much then, but I did know one thing for sure—this haphazard job that I just stumbled into after reading an ad in my local newspaper had changed my life forever—for the better.

Less than one year later, I heard about the Cheat River and decided to take the next step and start training

for the upcoming whitewater season. I can still vividly remember that first trip down the mighty Cheat Canyon and will never tire of retelling the stories of watching senior guides pack up their small raft, leave it on shore, and jump in other boats to continue downstream after losing a short-lived battle with one of the first hydraulics on the river. I remember thinking, "What did I get myself into?!"

But just as before, little did I know exactly what I had stumbled upon.

The truth is, not only did I find a lifelong passion—being on the river—but I also found myself out there.

I found myself in the water and learned how essential it is to go with the flow.

I found myself in the people and the entangled connections that introduce you to some of the most kind, humorous, and vivacious individuals.

I found myself in the verdant green that slowly penetrated the cold canyon walls in spring and the reminder that recovery is an important process of vitality.

I found myself in the perseverance in the river, the people, and the mountains.

It seems really cliché, but nowadays, I reflect a lot on my now-what-seems-like-extremely-long tenure in the whitewater community. From that reflection, one thing is extremely evident—lessons learned in outdoor recreation and adventuring in the wilderness can slowly permeate your everyday life, molding your morals and personal qualities before you can even realize it.

Slowly but surely, I went from river rat to environmental advocate. I wanted nothing more than to share my experience and passion with those who may not have had the privilege of experiencing it on their own while also doing everything I could to protect these



precious resources for future generations to experience.

This transformation of mine is funny, though. The thing about my experience on the Cheat River, during that first training trip, and every day I have spent on the river since is that I am not unique; these enthralling ventures, which will live rent-free in my head until the end of time, is something I share with many individuals and drives a lot of people to take action within themselves and the local community to protect what cannot protect itself. Many of those who have been through similar adaptations find their way to the banks of the Cheat River the first weekend of every May.

And that's why I love Cheat Fest so much. Not only is it a gathering of the whitewater community, but it is also a gathering of like-minded individuals who have all shared in an extraordinary experience within the Cheat Watershed and have decided to actively support and celebrate those at the forefront of protecting and preserving West Virginia's one-of-a-kind ecosystems.

Because of organizations like FOC and events like Cheat Fest, the Cheat

River, with its challenging rapids and stunning scenery, has made a remarkable comeback despite seeing more than its fair share of environmental challenges over the years. It truly showcases what can be done when a group of concerned citizens get together and begin fighting for the health of our environment and local communities.

WVHC is delighted to partner with FOC and sponsor the 30th annual Cheat Fest and the Rick Gusic Cheat River Massacre-ence, one of the largest mass-start kayaking races on the East Coast.

As a paddler, environmental advocate, and all-around lover of West Virginia, I am beyond excited to see my professional and personal worlds continuing to merge and to be allowed to share with so many individuals the impact that West Virginia has made in my life and why I work so hard to protect West Virginia's invaluable landscapes.

So, don't forget to mark your calendars for next year! I can't wait to see you all and celebrate the growing successes of the Cheat River at the hands of organizations like Friends of the Cheat on the first weekend of May!

Mountain Valley Pipeline Safety Issues Continue

By Dan Radmacher

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in terms of what we do from that meeting going forward if PHMSA can't guarantee our safety. We'll have to continue to keep each other safe as best we can."

Many of the responses from PHMSA staff seemed to highlight powers the agency does not have as well as the limits of its resources.

When a community member expressed concern about how close the pipeline route was to homes, Deputy Administrator Tristan Brown said, "Congress gives us no authority to regulate setbacks."

"PHMSA does not have authority to permanently shut down any pipeline," said Deputy Associate Administrator Linda Daugherty when another person asked what circumstances could prompt the agency to stop construction on a pipeline. "We don't have the authority to say we don't like how you are constructing the pipeline, so we are shutting it down."

The agency can issue a Notice of Proposed Safety Order if it finds unsafe conditions that require action by the pipeline developer — as it did with MVP in October 2023. The agency noted several concerns, including the effect of protective pipeline coating being exposed to the elements over years of construction delays.

That order led to a consent agreement between the agency and the pipeline developer that outlined review requirements for recoating the pipeline and other construction issues.

PHMSA staff tried to offer some reassurances. The consent agreement will require the developer to run a baseline test checking for corrosion and measuring the thickness of the pipe, a test that usually doesn't happen until after the pipeline is in service for years. But discussion of these measures and promises to investigate some of the issues documented by community members did little to alleviate the palpable



Robert Jones' home is literally a stone's throw away from the pipeline right-of-way. Photo by Dan Radmacher

anger and frustration in the room.

"PHMSA staff talked a lot about how they were there to listen to the community," says Jessica Sims, Virginia field coordinator for Appalachian Voices, the organization that produces this publication. "But they cannot understand what it feels like to live in the blast zone of a pipeline when it does not seem like state and federal regulators are doing nearly enough to protect you."

Robert Jones' house is about half a football field away from the pipeline. The retired engineering professor has contacted PHMSA and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission repeatedly about concerns he has over a section of pipe near his home that was installed last year.

Jones believes the trench wasn't backfilled and compacted properly, and the pipe didn't have proper support beneath it. There are visible cracks in the ground running where the trench

was dug, and a pipeline marker that was at a 90-degree angle is now drunkenly tilted, indicating that the ground beneath has shifted.

In reports sent to federal agencies, Jones and his neighbor Lynda Majors warn that these conditions indicate "a serious construction problem that could lead to an explosion at a pipeline crossover in Montgomery County when the pipeline is filled with gas."

The crossover connects two sections of pipe on either side of the right-of-way. According to Jones, the purpose of the crossover is to allow for thermal expansion and contraction of the pipeline.

The report is filled with pictures taken by Majors, who routinely monitors the right-of-way and took photos of various stages of the crossover construction and the settling of the ground over the installation. The photos show a length of pipe installed in the trench that is not supported by sandbags, as it

normally would be.

The photos also show the progression as the ground settled, cracks appeared and the marker tilted more and more over several months following the installation and burial of the pipe.

Jones and Majors were not very satisfied by the response from federal regulators. FERC responded by forwarding a letter from the pipeline developer that denied what it called "serious yet unfounded allegations regarding pipeline construction" in the report.

MVP's letter included a photo the company said showed the pipe resting on sandbags, a photo Jones dismissed as "inconclusive" in a response to FERC.

After Jones followed up, FERC responded by saying his concerns fell under PHMSA's areas of responsibility.

Nita Raju, a PHMSA community liaison, wrote, "At the crossover trench site in question, final restoration work is still pending. The applicable MVP documents were reviewed and there were no non-compliances found."

Majors was let down by the response.

"What this tells us is ... how little agencies care," she says.

Jones was a bit more blunt.

"We're stuck with a bunch of yoyos who point their fingers at each other," he says. "They shift responsibility for any action. MVP does something wrong and I point it out, but nothing happens."

While he's especially concerned with the problems he sees with the crossover near his home, Jones believes the entire route is misguided and dangerous.

"You've got poor soil, landslides, the Giles County seismic zone, frequent downpours and karst topography," says Jones. "FERC only looks at damage to environmental features like streams

continued on page 9

Community Action Opportunities

WVDNR Launches Hellbender, Mudpuppy Citizen Science Survey

ANGLERS, MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE ENCOURAGED TO REPORT OBSERVATIONS USING THE SURVEY123 APP.

In an effort to learn more about the distribution of hellbenders and mudpuppies, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has launched a citizen science project to track sightings of these important but declining salamanders around the state.

The project, which will take two years to complete, gives anglers, science enthusiasts and members of the public a chance to help WVDNR biologists map the distribution of hellbenders and mudpuppies and protect these unique amphibians and their habitats.

“While hellbenders and mudpuppies might look fearsome and strange, these salamanders are harmless to humans and sportfish populations and play a big part in keeping our waterways healthy,” said Kevin Oxenrider, project leader. “As we track sightings over the next two years, we want to encourage everyone to keep their eyes open, report their sightings and help us protect these important salamanders and their habitats for future generations.”

Anglers and members of the public who see a hellbender or mudpuppy in their local waterway or inadvertently catch one while fishing can report their sighting to

the WVDNR by completing a short questionnaire, which includes questions about the date and location of the observation. Submitting a photo is encouraged. To learn more about the survey visit WVdnr.gov/hellbender-mudpuppy-survey.

Hellbenders and mudpuppies are the only two fully aquatic salamanders native to West Virginia. Neither species is poisonous or venomous, and they eat mainly crayfish, worms and insects, but occasionally eat small minnows or other smaller amphibians. Hellbenders and mudpuppies have not been shown to negatively impact sportfish populations.

Anglers who inadvertently hook a hellbender or mudpuppy should immediately release the animal into the water by cutting the line as close to the hook or extracting the hook (taking care to remove the barb with pliers before extracting). State law prohibits the possession or taking of a hellbender or mudpuppy.

WVDNR biologists will use data collected during the survey to better understand hellbender and mudpuppy distribution and status in West Virginia, and to inform future conservation efforts.

“Every observation counts,” said Oxenrider. “You don’t have to be an angler to participate.”

For more information about hellbenders, mudpuppies and other citizen science projects, visit WVdnr.gov/surveys.

Woods Wacky Week (W5)

Woods Wacky Week of Work and Relaxation (W5). A week of exciting trail maintenance on the Allegheny Trail with the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association from June 14 to June 21.

Usually, the week of West Virginia’s birthday (June 20). Join us for our biggest event of the year, W5! Come spend the week, weekend, or however long you can! Camping is free for tents, or car camping, facilities are located on-site.

Where: Davis / Thomas, Section 2 of the ALT.

Who: Leader for the W5 is ALT Section 2 Coordinator Jeff Byard.

Arrival time: 8:15 am (each day).

Meet at the Harmon Mountain Farm Campground, 193 Mountain Farm Road, Harman WV 26270

Tailgate Safety Talk: 8:30 am (first day).

Lodging / Camping: Free camping at Harmon Mountain Farm Campground.

Register at hikethealleghenyltrail.org and select the day or days you plan to attend.

Celebrate Elizabeth Woods in Monongalia County

The Old-Growth Forest Network will celebrate Elizabeth Woods in Monongalia County on Saturday, June 8 from 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at Little Falls Rd., Morgantown, WV 26508.

The 82-acre preserve is an excellent example of an Appalachian ‘hardwood forest’ composed of oak-hickory. There are also sections of mixed-mesophytic forest with yellow poplar, sugar maple, and oak. White and chestnut oaks are approximately 120 to 130 years old. The forest is managed by the West Virginia Land Trust. Advance registration is required. Please visit the Eventbrite event listing for more information and to register at oldgrowthforest.net

Mountain Valley Pipeline Safety Issues Continue *continued from page 7*

Letter to the Editor

and wetlands. They should not just be asking what the pipeline can do to the environment — they should be asking what the environment can do to the pipeline.”

If MVP is allowed to go into service, some things will change in the Jones' household.

“We used to host Thanksgiving, Christmas and birthdays here,” he says. “I can't imagine having my family members come here with the possibility the pipeline could explode. I wouldn't put my family in that position.”

Local Emergency Response Planning

The Appalachian Voice reached out to officials in Roanoke and Montgomery counties to find out what, if any, special safety planning is happening as the final stretches of pipeline are trenched. Both counties said that, while they don't have specific emergency plans for pipeline disasters, they have plans that cover a variety of situations.

“First responders across Montgomery County have received specialized training from Paradigm, a company that specializes in pipeline training,” says Mary Biggs, chairwoman of the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors.

Roanoke County first responders have not received training specific to pipeline emergencies, according to Amy Whittaker, public information officer for the county.

“Public safety agencies are already prepared for any kind of emergency,” Whittaker says. “We have emergency drills, including tabletop drills and real-world-type drills on how to respond

to emergencies. We keep emergency personnel trained and ready.”

Officials in both counties said they have mutual aid response plans to coordinate response to incidents with the pipeline along the portion of the route that stretches along the counties' borders.

An Update

On April 22, Mountain Valley Pipeline sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission asking for official permission by May 23 to place MVP in service.

“Requesting an in-service decision by May 23 leaves the company very little time to implement the safety measures required by its agreement with PHMSA,” said Jessica Sims, Virginia field coordinator for Appalachian Voices, the nonprofit organization that produces this publication. “There is no rush, other than to satisfy MVP's capacity customers' contracts — a situation of the company's own making. We remain deeply concerned about the construction methods and the safety of communities along the route of MVP.”

Less than two weeks after MVP sent that letter, a section of buried pipeline ruptured during hydrostatic testing — which involves sending water through the pipeline at high pressure. Twenty-three Virginia legislators wrote FERC to oppose MVP's in-service request, citing the rupture as an “alarming” indication that the pipeline is not ready.

This article has been reprinted from The Appalachian Voice, the publication of Appalachian Voices. Learn more at appvoices.org

Dear Editor,

I attended the recent Open House regarding the Monongahela National Forest's Draft Deer Creek Environmental Assessment intended to inform the public about this project, only to find myself confounded by maps that were almost indecipherable and filled with technical jargon. Terms like “Replace Aquatic Organism Passage,” “Soil Restoration on Existing Linear Features,” “Riparian Underplantings,” “Targeted Northern Hardwood and Spruce Release,” and “New Administrative Use Two Track” were utterly meaningless to me and I would guess to many other attendees without a background in forestry.

I finally (through speaking with very friendly staff) decoded that “New Administrative Use Two Track” means... building a road. “Replace Aquatic Organism Passage” means... replacing culverts. “Targeted Northern Hardwood and Spruce Release” means... cutting old-growth trees that are taller than other trees to give the spruce trees more light. How are we supposed to engage with and understand the true impacts of these actions when they are shrouded in such opaque language?

The public deserves transparency. We need clear communication about what this project entails and its environmental impacts. The proposed actions (from what I was able to make out) entail a loss of old-growth trees, vital habitats, and crucial carbon sinks. If this proposal proceeds, there will be clear-cutting operations, some conducted by helicopter, and the use

of herbicides to remove “undesirable” trees. The American Forest Foundation has highlighted that clearcutting and similar practices lead to significant reductions in forest resilience and ecological stability.

The operations proposed in Project #60882, particularly the use of heavy machinery and helicopters, have the potential to generate significant noise pollution. This could disturb local wildlife, including nocturnal species that are particularly sensitive to noise. Additionally, the increased noise levels could negatively affect the quality of life for residents who value the tranquility of our rural environment.

In my opinion, we need more public outreach, including additional Open Houses with accessible language and straightforward explanations. The public comment period should be extended to allow adequate time for informed feedback.

I call upon everyone to really look into this project and understand any impacts on our community. Learn more here: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/mnf/?project=60882> (link to comment or object is <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=60882>).

Project contact information: Thomas Craig, Box 67, Bartow, WV 24920, phone: 304-538-4446, email: Thomas.Craig@usda.gov

Please note that the comment period ends by end of day June 14, 2024.

Sincerely,
Miriam Weber, Green Bank, WV

ALLEGHENY-BLUE RIDGE ALLIANCE

View ABRA's Conservation Web Map for the Deer Creek Integrated Resource Project in the Monongahela National Forest [here](#).



West Virginia Mountain Odyssey Upcoming Events

Bird Walk and Banding Demo + Old Hemlock Farmhouse Tour, July 14: Spend the morning with us at the Old Hemlock property in Preston County for a bird walk, farmhouse museum tour, and optional bird banding demonstration on Sunday, July 14 from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

Old Hemlock was the home of George Bird and Kathryn Harris Evans. The Old Hemlock property contains virgin hemlock trees and is maintained in its natural state with multi-age woodlands as a nature and wildlife preserve. The property was added to the National Register of Historic places in 2015. Learn more about the history of this property at oldhemlock.org

The excursion will include a gentle bird walk (one mile) through mature and young forest habitat, a tour of the historic house, an overview of George and Kay's life, a short presentation on the scientific management of 232 acres, and visitors may have an option to stay longer to walk the trails, visit the virgin hemlock forest and watch a bird banding demonstration. This tour will be led by LeJay Graffious, administrator of the Old Hemlock Foundation. We suggest you bring a bagged lunch. Restrooms will be available.

Old Growth Forest Hike and Tree Survey in Tucker County, August 17: Hike to the site of the proposed Upper Cheat River timbering project in the Monongahela National Forest near Parsons, West Virginia, and learn about the old growth characteristics of this site from ecologist and local resident John Coleman of Speak For The Trees Too. We will meet at the Horseshoe Recreation and Campground Area Day Use parking lot at 10 a.m.

The hike will involve measuring trees to determine their age. A small grove of trees documented in this area are over 200 years old. The hike will require a 0.5 mile hike up a steep ridge. Total time for hike and survey 3-4 hours. We suggest you bring a bagged lunch!

Registration links forthcoming. Mark your calendars!

Old Growth Forest Hike at Audra State Park, November 9: Visit the old growth tract in Audra State Park near Phillipi, West Virginia, on November 9 from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The old growth tract here is easily reached and explored. Naturalist and ecologist Doug Wood will lead this hike.

BECOME A WVHC MEMBER

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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

Making a Difference: Practical Actions That Individuals Can Take To Reduce Their Impact on Climate - Energy Efficiency

In passing the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the United States Congress made the largest investment in clean energy ever.

This historic legislation is projected to invest almost \$370 billion in clean energy — solar, wind, battery storage, geothermal, etc. — over the next ten years. As historic as the IRA is, and it has the potential to be transformational, it does not require individuals to make their homes energy efficient or require utilities to switch from using coal to renewables. The IRA does provide generous incentives or carrots, but few requirements or sticks. So, if the IRA is going to achieve its objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet the U.S. commitment under the Paris Climate Agreement, each of us will need to take action.

The Conservancy's Climate Guide suggests ways that individuals can take advantage of the benefits in the IRA as well as other measures that individuals can take to reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming. As important as individual responsibility is, it is not the only means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In the section entitled Be Involved, we make recommendations on how individuals can support policy changes to reduce greenhouse gases.

Here is our list of practical actions that individuals can take to help preserve the Earth's climate. It is not an exhaustive list, but a starting place for action. In this issue of The Highlands Voice, we will highlight how to make your home energy efficient. The following issues will feature the remainder of suggestions from the Climate Guide, which you can view in full on our website at wvhighlands.org/climate-change/

Making Your Home Energy Efficient

Making your home energy efficient is one of the most cost-effective means of reducing your carbon and methane footprint. Suggestions include:

- The IRA provides a 30 percent tax credit for installing many home energy efficiency measures, such as replacing windows and adding insulation. Tax credits are available to everyone regardless of income, but the tax benefits can take time: you don't receive the payment right away, instead, you will have to wait until next year's tax return.
- The IRA also established two new rebate programs. One helps homeowners to electrify their homes (for example, adding heat pumps or upgrading your electrical service). The other does not provide rebates on individual energy efficiency measures, but provides rebates based on reduction in energy use for the whole home. These two rebate programs, where there's no need to wait for next year's tax return, will likely be unavailable until 2024 and are limited to low- and moderate-income individuals and families.
- Other suggestions for making your home more energy efficient include:
 - Caulk all cracks and leaks in your house (eligible for tax credits).
 - Add insulation, particularly in your attic (eligible for tax credits).
 - Low-income individuals and families can get help weatherizing their homes through the regional Community Action Agencies (see wvcad.org/sustainable/

[ity/weatherization-assistance-program](http://www.weatherization-assistance-program.com)). Appalachian Power and Wheeling Power offer free home energy assessments at takechargewv.com

- Don't set your thermostat too high in the winter or too low in the summer and install a programmable thermostat.
- Add or replace weather stripping on all exterior doors.
- Periodically change the air filter in your furnace.
- Replace old single-pane windows (eligible for tax credits)

- When a gas-fired furnace, central air conditioner or hot water tank needs replaced, replace them with high-efficiency heat pumps. The IRA currently provides a tax credit of 30 percent up to \$2,000 for adding a heat pump or heat pump water heater and up to \$600 for installing an energy efficient HVAC system. Even greater benefits (e.g., up to \$8,000 rebate for a heat pump for low-income households) will be available in the future.

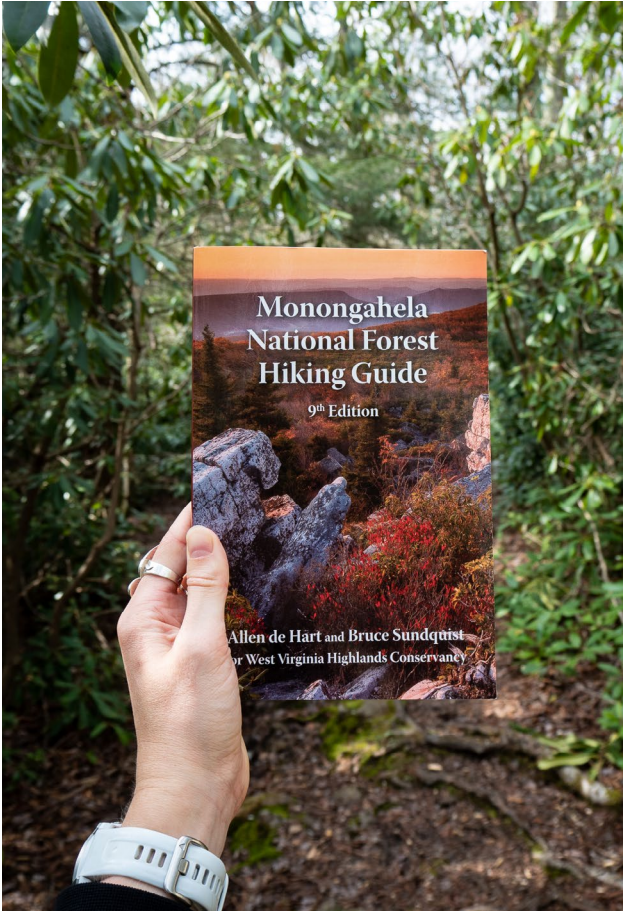
Mark your calendars for WVHC's 2024 Fall Review!

West Virginia Highlands Conservation Efforts: Exploring the Past and Present to Build a Sustainable Future

Oct. 18 - 19 at Cacapon Resort State Park

The West Virginia Highlands is a region steeped in rich history and natural beauty, with its old and mature forests, scenic vistas, and diverse wildlife. However, it is also a region facing significant environmental challenges, such as the construction of Corridor H and the potential loss of natural habitat. To address these challenges and more, it is essential to explore this unique region's past and present conditions, including its history, current conservation and preservation efforts, and how communities are responding to the ever-changing environment. By doing so, we can create a sustainable future for the West Virginia Highlands that protects its unique natural resources while promoting economic growth and community well-being.

Hit the trails with our 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.

Send \$21.95 plus \$4.87 shipping to: West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321 OR order from our website at www.wvhighlands.org

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