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# *The Highlands Voice*

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

Volume 56

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July 2024

## **The Alliance for Appalachia Takes on Washington, D.C.**

By Andrew Young

On June 11-14, the Alliance for Appalachia united in Washington, D.C., to demand environmental justice for Appalachia. Appalachians aged eight through 78 walked the halls of Capitol Hill together, sharing stories about our region, speaking truth to power, and fighting for the places and people we love. It was quite a sight to behold!

I joined 40 other Appalachians from seven states, representing 16 organizations across the region. We shared important skills with one another, like how to meet with legislators and staff and how to combine our learned experiences as Appalachians with data and evidence to advance policy goals



*WVHC Board Member Andrew Young (far left) traveled with The Alliance For Appalachia, representing 16 organizations from across the region for a week of action on Capitol Hill. (Photo by Seed Lynn)*

at the Federal level. Together, we met with more than 50 Congressional offices, three regulatory agencies, and four White House executive offices. We asked members of Congress to co-sponsor the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act. We asked Congress to end mountaintop removal coal mining and pass the Appalachian Communities Health Equity (ACHE) Act. We called for accountability for coal mine reclamation and bonding reform. We also demanded that Congress rescind funding for the Letcher County Prison Project.

The Alliance for Appalachia is a  
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# Thoughts From Our President

By Marilyn Shoenfeld

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has had a busy month—writing and submitting comments on issues of environmental significance, planning events, working with our partners, planning the Mountain Odyssey Outings Program, going on mine inspections, and much more. All this while trying to enjoy the beautiful spring and early summer weather with warm days, sunny skies, and cool nights. I've heard that the blueberries on Dolly Sods are almost ripe!

This month, I'd like us to take a look at one of the issues that WVHC is championing—preventing logging of old-growth trees on our public lands. All of us realize the value of our old-growth forests across the nation. A growing body of research highlights the huge role our old-growth forests play in carbon sequestration and climate mitigation, habitat preservation, supplying clean water, and maintaining ecosystem stability and resiliency. Older forests are also more resilient to wildfire.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, many acres of forestland that now comprise the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia were timbered, leaving little of the virgin old-growth forest behind. In areas where old-growth remains, it is limited to small, scattered patches within a larger mix of primarily 70—to 90-year-old forests. This unfortu-

nate reality makes it ever more important that mature forests are protected throughout the Monongahela National Forest so that more forests have the chance to become old-growth.

On Earth Day 2022, President Biden issued an Executive Order on Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities and Local Economies. This Executive Order directed federal agencies to conduct an inventory of mature and old-growth forests and develop strategies to protect them. This announcement made WVHC and many environmentalists hopeful that more would be done to protect and recruit old-growth forests. The initial inventory was released in April 2023. It included an inventory of such forests, funding for projects that maximize the retention of old trees, and much more. In December 2024, the White House issued a Fact Sheet outlining the steps to be taken to protect old-growth in National Forests across the country.

An important component of this plan is the development of a Land Management Plan Direction for Old-Growth Forest Conditions Across the National Forest System by the US Forest Service to achieve these goals. This plan's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was recently released on June 20, 2024. There is a public comment period following the publication of the

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

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DEIS, which closes on September 20.

On its surface, it does not appear that the alternatives outlined in the DEIS have any real teeth to enforce the level of protection for mature and old-growth forests we and many others were hopeful for. Instead, there are loopholes that still allow for commercial logging in old-growth forests so long as it is done in the name of wildfire management, forest health, or public safety. In our scoping comments, WVHC warned against the use of this language to justify targeting mature and old-growth forests. We are watching this play out in various timber projects in the Monongahela National Forest, such as the Upper Cheat River project, where the oldest trees in the stands are being targeted for harvest.

I would like to bring your attention to [John McFerrin's book review of Smokescreen: Debunking Wildfire Myths to Save Our Forests and Climate](#)

by Chad Hanson, published in the October 2023 issue of The Highlands Voice. The book challenges conventional wisdom on forest management and the general idea that thinning contributes to forest health and makes wildfires less intense. The author relies on his own research and studies from the field, which are noted in the book.

We must urge the Forest Service to take concrete action to recover the old-growth that has been lost in the Monongahela National Forest and National Forests across the nation and to protect more mature forests so that they, too, can become old-growth.

WVHC will examine the Draft Environmental Impact Statement closely and issue an action alert to our members in the coming weeks to join us in commenting. Be sure you are signed up for our emails to be notified of the alert.

*See you next month!*

## 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.

# Exploring Native American Influences in Appalachian Traditions and Cuisine

By Larry Jent, *Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area*

The Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area (AFNHA) is celebrating America 250 with Indigenous Appalachia events, recognizing Native peoples who have contributed to Appalachian culture. The unique customs, traditions, and heritage of this region have roots in European, African, and Native American ways of life. Together, they form a stream that is living, vibrant, and constantly evolving.

One way to understand Native contributions to this region and the world beyond, is in the kitchen. More than 60 percent of the world's table fare was introduced by Native American farmers.

The best-known contribution is corn or maize. It is grown on every continent except Antarctica and is cultivated in over 165 countries. It is the most produced cereal in the world, with annual production of more than 1 billion tons. But here's the thing: there is no such thing as wild maize. About 10,000 years ago—at the dawn of agriculture—Native farmers began selectively breeding maize by crossing teosinte (a wild grain) with prairie grasses. Today, corn is on our tables, in our gas tanks, sweetening our foods, and creating bio-degradable plastics.

This accomplishment alone would make ancient Native agronomists among the world's greatest. But there is much more.

Nightshade is a deadly poisonous plant. But through selective breeding, ancient Native agriculturalists created a dizzying array of delicious products. Tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplants, tobacco, okra, sorrel, goose berries, goji berries—even petunias—are all derived from nightshade.

Native contributions did not stop with these hybrids. Farmers were using

terraces for crops 4,000 years ago. They developed no-till planting techniques, and even learned to freeze dry potatoes. That box of instant potato buds on your grocer's shelves? It is a Native American gift of convenience and preservation.

Maize and nightshades are amazing, but Indigenous gifts to the world do not stop there. Native people across Turtle Island (North America) refer to corn, beans, and squash as the three sisters. Hundreds of varieties of beans have come down from Native American cultivars. Squash, gourds, and pumpkins are summer and autumn staples.

Planting the three sisters together is a symbiotic farm technique: together they produce more than they can by themselves. Corn provides a trellis for the beans. The broad leaves of squash provide shade to conserve water and inhibit weeds. And beans enrich the soil with nitrogen, a natural fertilizer.

Other Native American foods include cranberries, pineapples, cocoa, peanuts, wild rice, avocados, papayas, pecans, strawberries, blueberries, and more. Think for a moment about how these gifts have shaped cuisines all over the world. Can you imagine Italian food without tomatoes? Thai food without peppers? Or Thanksgiving tables without pumpkins? Today as people all over the world set down for dinner, it is almost impossible to find a table without some kind of Native American food.

Of course, that goes for Appalachian traditional foods as well. Indigenous people have contributed to mountain culture in many ways, but table fare may be the most important—and probably the gift we enjoy the most!

To learn more about AFNHA and our Indigenous Voices events, visit [appalachianforestnha.org/indigenous-appalachia](http://appalachianforestnha.org/indigenous-appalachia)

# Early Conservancy Activist and Attorney Passes

By Dave Elkinton



The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has been blessed with the talents of many activists and lawyers, but few were as critically important in the Conservancy's early days as Jim Moorman. A public interest attorney who eventually earned a national reputation as a leader in the new field of environmental law, Moorman died on April 23, 2024, at the age of 86. His memorial service was held in Washington, DC, last month.

I met Jim in 1970 at the fall meeting of the board of the Conservancy where it considered what it should do about the announcement of the Davis Power Project, a proposal to flood the Canaan Valley for a pumped-storage power project. It was Jim who said the Conservancy should file a "petition to intervene," a legal maneuver that would give us access to all legal filings and hearings. That suggestion, and his guidance in making that filing, gave the Conservancy "standing" that facilitated the Conservancy's active leadership in defeating the Davis Power Plant and eventually establishing the Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge in August 1994. Without Jim's early leadership, the outcome could have been very different.

But that was only one of his critical efforts to save special places in West Virginia. Earlier in 1970, the Conservancy had filed a lawsuit to stop core drilling in the Otter Creek area, using

the theory that the core drilling would ruin its potential as a Wilderness area (with a capital W). Jim and his close friend, the late Fred Anderson, also an active Conservancy leader and environmental lawyer in DC, wrote the brief that was eventually successful before Judge Robert Maxwell in Elkins. The core drilling would be permitted, but all equipment had to be transported into Otter Creek by mules. When little coal of market quality was found, Otter Creek was able to be designated as a federally protected Wilderness Area by the United States Congress, one of the first in the eastern US. Again, Jim's keen legal mind was crucial in that process.

In 1970, Jim was with the Public Interest Center for Law and Social Policy in DC and frequently visited the West Virginia Highlands on weekends. Shortly thereafter, Jim became the leader of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, which helped fund the Conservancy and other groups' legal efforts to preserve the Canaan Valley. (The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund would become EarthJustice in later years.)

With Jimmy Carter's election in 1976, Moorman returned from California and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund to become Assistant Attorney General of the Lands and Natural Resources Division of the Justice Department. Following his service in government, he entered private practice and was also an active board leader in the environmental public interest community until retirement.

Author's note: Much more of the story of Jim Moorman's contributions to the preservation of the West Virginia mountains, as well as that of other early leaders of the Conservancy, can be found in "[Fighting to Protect the Highlands: The First Forty Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy](#)," published in 2007.

## West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

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

### Books

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

**To order by mail** make checks payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Please indicate the item and relevant color and size if applicable. To view and purchase store items online, visit [wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org)



## 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 two 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.)



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Please email any poems, letters, commentaries, events, etc. to the Voice editor at [olivia.miller@wvhighlands.org](mailto:olivia.miller@wvhighlands.org) or by real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

# Burning Biomass for Electricity: Good Idea or Not?

By John McFerrin

Burning biomass for electricity is coming to West Virginia, or at least a major proposal to burn biomass to make electricity. We don't know where, and we don't know when, but the signs are there. If we are easing toward burning biomass for electricity, we should take a close look at that practice.

The big sign was Senate Bill 688, considered (but not passed) by the 2024 West Virginia Legislature. Senate Bill 688 would have authorized the West Virginia Division of Forestry to sell the right to come onto publicly owned forest land (state-owned or leased forests, natural and scenic areas, wildlife management areas) and conduct activities for "purposes of protecting, preserving and maintaining such lands from forest fire." The idea, as described in the debate, was to cut out underbrush that would serve as fuel for forest fires. By doing so, according to this argument, major forest fires would be reduced. Although the bill did not specifically mention parks, the discussion on the bill in the State Senate assumed that parks were included.

SB 688 was a scam on its face. Nobody is going to pay for the privilege of coming onto public lands and cutting underbrush. As part of the debate, one Senator explained that the bill would result in removing invasive species overwhelming areas of the forests — chiefly autumn olive and kudzu.

Nobody is going to pay the state of West Virginia for the privilege of cutting autumn olive and kudzu. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of landowners who would welcome cutting kudzu on their land. They would not charge.

The true purpose of the bill—not the stated purpose of wildfire control—appears elsewhere. The bill allows the Division of Forestry to sell what is cut. Since kudzu trimmings have no market value, what they are selling is trees. SB 688 was a backdoor to cutting more trees on public lands. It may not (or it may) be opening the way to cutting big

trees, the ones for building houses or furniture. But SB 688 provided an avenue to cutting trees.

The scaminess of SB 688 was more apparent in its tool to avoid public scrutiny. It provided for letting the contracts for the right to cut brush (or kudzu) on public lands through the regular contracting procedure, including public notice and competitive bidding. Then it created a loophole that bypasses that procedure altogether. It allowed the Division of Forestry to bypass the regular procedure if the tree cutting was "a necessary component of an economic development project." Since every scheme to cut trees would be part of an economic development project (why else would someone pay to do it?), all contracts would have been let privately.

At the West Virginia Legislature, bad ideas never die. They just come back in a different form. Maybe the next time, it will come back without the tool to avoid public scrutiny; maybe it will be presented as cutting trees, not trimming kudzu and autumn olive. Maybe it will present in a more straightforward way the question of whether it is a good idea to cut brush and small trees (or big trees) on public lands in order to burn it to make electricity. If that is the case, we should look at the use of biomass to make electricity.

In general terms, biomass is organic material, meaning it is made of material that comes from living organisms, such as plants and animals.

In the context of electricity production, the most common biomass materials used are plants, wood, and waste. These are called biomass feedstocks. There are operations that cut down entire forests and process them into pellets to be burned to make electricity. Although the opaque nature of SB 688 makes it impossible to tell for sure, the emphasis in the discussion on cutting underbrush on state lands makes it appear that what is contemplated is cutting small trees and under-

brush to burn to make electricity.

So, is that a good idea? Is it a good idea to cut underbrush and small trees (or big trees, the proposal is not clear) from our public lands and burn it to make electricity? Would that practice contribute to global warming? If the alternative is burning coal, is burning wood preferable?

As with anything having to do with global warming, the answer is complicated. In the short term, burning coal is preferable. Wood is less energy-dense than coal. Because of this, more carbon dioxide is released per kilowatt hour of electricity produced from burning wood than from burning coal. We would emit more carbon dioxide in producing a unit of electricity by burning wood than we would emit by producing that same unit of electricity by burning coal.

In spite of this, burning wood for electricity is often described as a carbon-neutral process. The idea is that the carbon that is in wood was sequestered there during the life of the tree, usually a century or less. As the forest regrows, an equivalent amount of carbon will be sequestered over the next century or so.

The flaw in describing burning wood for electricity as carbon neutral is the timing. Rome was not built in a

day; neither is a forest. It is estimated that the carbon that is released by burning wood for electricity will not be reabsorbed by a growing forest for a century. During that time, the carbon dioxide will remain in the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

While burning coal rather than wood for electricity may be better in the short run, in the long run (over the next few centuries and millennia) it would be better to burn wood. It has to do with what scientists call the carbon cycle. Trees absorb carbon dioxide over years or centuries; it is released by burning the wood; it is reabsorbed by trees over years or centuries.

Coal is on a much larger cycle. The carbon it contains was sequestered underground millions of years ago. It will go back to being sequestered over a similar time scale. We have a buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere because we are releasing carbon (from fossil fuels) more rapidly than it could be reabsorbed during anything like a human scale. As a result, it builds up in the atmosphere.

In deciding whether to allow wood from our public lands to be burned for electricity, the choice is not clear cut. Both burning wood and coal have carbon emission costs.

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## 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](mailto:crys.bauer@wvhighlands.org)

# Trouble Above the South Fork of the Cherry River

By Olivia Miller

In June, representatives from the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and partner groups went on a citizen inspection of South Fork Coal Company's South Fork Deep Mine No. 2 in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. In May, WVHC submitted comments opposing the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) permit renewal application for this deep mine. South Fork Coal Company is the only known coal operator with active permits in the critical habitat of the endangered candy darter.

This mining company has inflicted tremendous damage to a remarkably wild and seemingly boundless high-elevation Appalachian ecosystem along the border of the Monongahela National Forest, with plans to expand and excavate more metallurgical coal from deep within the mountains.

The purpose of a SMCRA permit renewal is to ensure that mining operations continue to comply with environmental and regulatory requirements set forth by SMCRA. The renewal process provides an opportunity for public input and ensures continued oversight and accountability of mining operations.

Our input on this permit renewal application remained the same as for every other permit renewal application in critical candy darter habitat. South Fork Coal Company has not implemented protective plans for the candy darter as required by the Endangered Species Act. The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection have failed to enforce these plans since 2020. Every permit held by South Fork Coal Company lacks these protective plans.

This particular deep mine has been sealed and abandoned for several decades. The permit area has been reclaimed, and all disturbed and reclaimed areas still flow through a sedi-

ment control structure. The permitted area is solely being used to support the 1,000-plus acre adjacent Rocky Run Surface Mine.

A drainage ditch to a settling pond used to collect stormwater runoff from the site had been destroyed by timbering operations an unknown number of years ago, rendering the drainage ditch ineffective. Meanwhile, the potentially toxic mine runoff was headed for the South Fork of the Cherry River in the valley below, as it presumably had been for years.

Although this mine had been sealed and reclaimed many years ago, two locations within the permit boundary had unexplainable toxic mine drainage. At the time, there was no explanation for where the drainage was coming from or why it was occurring. The inspection took place during the middle of drought-like conditions, yet vibrant orange water was still flowing steadily from deep within the earth, threatening to permanently degrade the once pristine South Fork of the Cherry River below and push the candy darter ever closer to extinction. We are still awaiting results from the water samples to confirm if the water was polluted by acid mine drainage. The second settling pond appeared to have pipes diverting water off-site that had recently been poorly covered up.

South Fork Coal Company has received permits to operate strip mines and associated infrastructure on nearly 3,300 acres here since 2012. This adds to the roughly 550 acres of surface coal mining permits the company has held in Greenbrier County since the 1990s.

WVHC remains committed to advocating for stringent oversight and regulatory enforcement to preserve the region's natural beauty and ecological integrity, and protect both humans and wildlife from the harms of coal mining pollution.



*Permanent chemical treatment line attached to the deep mine's wet seal discharge pipe. This location drains to the headwaters of the South Fork Cherry River. Photo taken by the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection during a citizen inspection of South Fork Coal Co.'s South Fork Deep Mine No. 2 on June 26, 2024.*

# The Alliance for Appalachia Takes on Washington, D.C.

By Andrew Young

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coalition of 18 member organizations founded in 2006 to strengthen the region's effort to end mountaintop removal coal mining. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has been a long-time member of The Alliance for Appalachia and was part of its founding. For more information on The Alliance for Appalachia, visit [theallianceforappalachia.org](http://theallianceforappalachia.org)

Appalachian people are visionary, innovative, fair-minded, and fiercely passionate about building a future where everyone can survive and thrive while sustaining our special ways of life. However, it is no secret that we are suffering from the cumulative impacts of class inequality, legacy pollution, neglected infrastructure, industry-captured government, greedy corporations, underfunded public education, cultural stereotypes, and inequality of opportunity relative to citizens of many other non-Appalachian states. The list goes on. At its core, the fossil fuel and resource extraction economic practices like mountaintop removal coal mining, clear-cut timbering, natural gas pipelines, and shale fracking for natural gas destroy ecosystems and endanger communities throughout their supply chains.

I was proud to join The Alliance for Appalachia to advocate for more protection for our communities and environment. To better understand our efforts, let's take a closer look at each of the key bills we lobbied for during our time in D.C.

**The Environmental Justice for All Act, H.R. 1705/ S. 919** aims to address environmental justice issues across the country, including the potential to have far-reaching impacts on communities that have been disproportionately affected by environmental hazards and legacy pollution. The Appalachian region has long been impacted by the consequences of extractive industries



*Vernon Haltom, executive director of Coal River Mountain Watch (left) and Andrew Young, WVHC board member (middle) meet with Chris Kloss, director, Water Permits Division, EPA Office of Water (right). Photo by Seed Lynn*

and has suffered from a lack of adequate environmental protections and enforcement due to state agencies that are captured by special interests (these same interests also run the state legislatures). The Environmental Justice for All Act strengthens legal protections for Environmental Justice communities, increases funding for proactive programs, and enhances public participation in environmental decision-making processes.

**The ACHE Act, or Appalachian Communities Health Equity Act, H.R. 5022**, would place a moratorium on issuing and renewing permits for mountaintop removal coal mining until a health study is conducted. Mountaintop removal destroys mountains and headwater streams, and ultrafine airborne particulates like silica lead to rare cancers in the surrounding communities where people are forced to breathe them in. This is happening across the State of West Virginia, where

cancer rates, mortality rates, and chronic illnesses are far higher in coal-producing areas than in the rest of the United States, and these higher cancer rates have been linked to mountaintop coal mining.

**The Zombie Mine Prevention Package** is a suite of three bills addressing crucial issues related to mine reclamation and environmental protection. In similar ways that active mining puts communities at risk, so too do unreclaimed "zombie mines" with wash-outs, permanent toxic mine drainage, denuded and unstable soils, sedimentation, and increased severity of flooding impacts due to lack of vegetation. Issues such as chronic violations, unpaid fines, and flooding across the region strengthen the case for these legislation initiatives.

- **The Coal Cleanup Taxpayer Protection Act, H.R. 7940**, eliminates self-bonding and requires an appraisal of any property used for

bonding purposes. It also requires states to regularly evaluate the adequacy of bond amounts.

- **Bond Improvement and Reclamation Assurance Act, H.R. 8941**, ensures sufficient bond amounts and long-term water treatment. It clarifies that coal company executives are on the hook for full reclamation costs.
- **Stream Protection and Vegetation Restoration Act, H.R. 8062**, requires contemporaneous reclamation and prohibits permits from sitting idle for more than a total of six months within any three-year period.

Lastly, we lobbied Congress to build community, not more federal prisons, and rescind funding for the Letcher County, Kentucky, Prison Project. Prisons are not part of a just transition nor healthy economies. Prisons perpetuate environmental injustices and mass incarceration. This project, an earmark for Kentucky Representative, Hal Rogers, would be built on the site of an old strip mine. It would affect communities within a 500-mile radius of Roxana, Kentucky, and particularly families of individuals sentenced to federal prison. We demanded Congress rescind the \$500 million in the FY25 appropriations bill for the proposed federal prison project as an unjust, unnecessary, wasteful use of taxpayer money. Until there is environmental and economic justice, the strictly non-partisan Alliance will turn to our proud history of resistance and stubbornly demand a just transition off fossil fuels. We are stronger together and will never stop fighting to achieve the promise of America for everyone!

**You can help amplify our voices by contacting your legislators today. Our friends at Appalachian Voices have set up an action alert where you can quickly send a letter to your representatives at [appvoices.org/actions/stop-zombie-mines/](http://appvoices.org/actions/stop-zombie-mines/)**

# Community Action Opportunities

## WVHC and ABRA to Co-Host Gaslight Webinar with Jonathan Mingle

On Thursday, Aug. 1, from 12:30-1:30 p.m., the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance will co-host a webinar with Jonathan Mingle, author of *Gaslight: The Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Fight for America's Energy Future*.

Imagine one day receiving a letter in the mail informing you that Dominion Energy is planning to build a massive pipeline through your property. What would you think? That this energy behemoth, with 109 billion dollars in total assets and a production portfolio consisting of 48% from natural gas, will do whatever it wants with your property? Even if your family has lived there since before the Revolutionary War? Or do you stand up with your neighbors and fight for your land, your health, and your rights? You fight. And you win.

That's the story Jonathan Mingle tells in *Gaslight: The Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Fight for America's Energy Future*. In this vivid and suspenseful true story, Mingle chronicles the communities that became Dominion's staunchest foes. This land, stretching from the Blue Ridge foothills to the Shenandoah Valley and the Allegheny highlands, is home to the lawyers and farmers, conservationists and conservatives, scientists and nurses, innkeepers and lobbyists, regular people that fought back and won against Dominion.

Mingle will discuss his new book, *Gaslight*, and paint a portrait of the people involved in the fight. Join him to become inspired in your climate activism!

Visit [wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org) to register for the webinar.

## ALT Section 2 Group Hike

Join the West Virginia Scenic Trails Association for an organized trip along West Virginia's longest trail on July 26-28! This will be a nine-mile overnight backpack trip from the Route 33 trailhead to Gladly Road. A majority of the hike will take place along Gladly Creek and camping by McCray Creek.

Please bring your own equipment, snacks and dinner. This will be a moderate level hike. For more information and to register for the event visit [hikethealleghenytrail.org](http://hikethealleghenytrail.org)

**Where:** Gladly, West Virginia, Section 2 of the ALT.

## WVHC Seeks Applications for AFNHA AmeriCorps Position

Do you love the West Virginia Highlands and have a passion for environmental stewardship and conservation? The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is seeking applicants for the 2024-2025 Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area AmeriCorps position!

The Outreach and Education Coordinator will work closely with WVHC leadership to coordinate outreach efforts and engagement opportunities throughout the West Virginia Highlands region and beyond, in-person and through various media outlets, with the overarching goal of fostering a culture of environmental stewardship in the Mountain State.

From facilitating the West Virginia Mountain Odyssey: Outings, Education and Beyond program to assisting the Dolls Sods Wilderness Stewards program, the Outreach and Education Coordinator will be essential in the planning, development, and volunteer management of events that aim to protect the unique character of the Highlands, educate the public about regional environmental issues and create opportunities for people to explore the great outdoors. The Member will also play a much-needed role in external communications, including contributing to our monthly publication, the Highlands Voice, and the occasional press releases, one-pagers, and social media posts.

**Details:** This is a full-time, one-year position that will start in September 2024. The position will be based out of Davis, West Virginia. Grads can earn an education stipend and may be eligible for a WV Public Higher Education Tuition Waiver.

Email us at [info@wvhighlands.org](mailto:info@wvhighlands.org) for more information about the position, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's mission, or any questions you might have!

View the position and apply online at: [appalachianforestnha.org/conservation](http://appalachianforestnha.org/conservation)

## ALT Section 2 Group Hike

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

**When:** July 26-28. For those who can, hikers will gather on Friday to stay at the Gladly Shelter. This depends on weather and registrations. On Saturday, the meeting location will be at the Route 33 trailhead and hike to the campsite just past McCray Run. On Sunday, the group will hike to the other trailhead and shuttle.



# Burning Biomass for Electricity: Good Idea or Not?

*continued from page 5*

There is, however, a third choice: leave the wood that we might allow to be cut in place and allow it to continue absorbing carbon dioxide. There are many complicating factors in calculating how much carbon dioxide a forest absorbs. Young trees may absorb different amounts of carbon than older trees, etc. It is beyond dispute, however, that any trees or underbrush are sequestering carbon. That's what plants do, absorb carbon dioxide and sequester carbon. Rather than burning them for electricity we could just leave them alone, doing the beneficial work of sequestering carbon that they are already doing.

If, of course, a law passes that is similar to SB 688, those proposing cutting trees to burn for electricity will not have to justify their proposal. Their proposal would not be subject to public scrutiny. They would only have to convince the Secretary of the Department of Commerce that cutting trees is necessary to economic development, not an onerous task. The Secretary of the Department of Commerce is not in the forest protection or carbon sequestration business. It never met an econom-

ic development project it didn't like.

If, however, a proposal is ever presented to the public, it would be described as a win-win proposition. Cutting brush and small trees would provide fuel for electricity while making the forest less prone to wildfires.

The assumption behind this argument is unfounded. There is considerable research on the question of whether thinning of forests reduces the risk of wildfires. The research that supports thinning of forests addresses what it calls "seasonally dry forests." These forests are in the western United States and in the southern United States. They are not in West Virginia. Our forests do not typically have the dry conditions where thinning is useful in controlling fires.

When SB 688 did not pass in the 2024 Legislature, we dodged a bullet. There is no indication that it would have made fires in our forests any less likely or any less severe. It was based on the dubious assumption that burning trees from our public lands to make electricity is an ecologically sound plan. Just like other bad ideas, it will be back next year. We need to be ready.

# Southern WV Needs Clean Water: Contact Leaders Now!

**Wyoming County residents have faced severe water quality issues in the Wolf Pen/Indian Creek area, highlighting a regional water crisis.**

From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice focuses on McDowell County, specifically on the communities of Gary, Leckie, and Anawalt, each suffering from compromised water sources. Gary's city water infrastructure is crumbling, Leckie's well water changed dramatically around the time nearby surface mining began, and Anawalt's public water system remains underfunded despite a \$7 million project approval.

Residents report orange to black tap water, often with a thick, filmy "goop." Since May 2024, the community has funded the distribution of over 2,060 cases of water (82,400 bottles) to 280+ homes in McDowell County.

Many residents drive up to 20 minutes to collect spring water, with seniors depending on neighbors for this essential task. For some, the cost of bottled water exceeds \$100 per month, and poor water quality has ruined clothes, caused chemical burns, and corroded plumbing fixtures. McDowell County, one of the poorest in America, urgently needs help.

**Action Needed:** We need your help to raise awareness and pressure decision-makers to act. This is a widespread regional crisis that cannot be ignored. Join WV Rivers Coalition, WV Faith Collective, and From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice today.

Contact the WV Governor's Office, members of the WV House Committee on Technology & Infrastructure, and your WV state representatives today. Ask them to declare a State of Emergency to provide clean water to coalfield residents throughout the region until the Anawalt public service district project and other drinking water infrastructure needed throughout the region are fully funded and completed.



Scan the QR code above or visit <https://bit.ly/4bvhl6m> to act!

## Become a WVHC member!

Help us continue our 50-year legacy of protecting clean air, clean water, forests, streams, mountains, and the health and welfare of the residents of West Virginia people and those who visit.

Purchase a membership online at [wvhighlands.org/membershiprenewals/](https://wvhighlands.org/membershiprenewals/)

# 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](http://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.

Learn more and register at <https://bit.ly/OldHemlock>

**2024 Summer Splash: Paddle the Cheat River! July 28:** As warmer weather arrives, we are excited to announce a new stop on this year's mountain odyssey! Get ready to cool off in this summer heat the right way, and make a real splash of fun with the 2024 Summer Splash on Sunday, July 28!

Start your day at Blackwater Outdoor Adventures (Parsons, WV) at 10 AM to enjoy a breathtaking 4-mile paddle down the scenic waters of the Cheat River. Make sure to keep some dry cash in your car for after the paddle. There will be food, drinks, and all of your favorite WVHC merchandise available for purchase!

We are grateful to announce that, thanks to the generous support from the American Water Charitable Foundation, the Conservancy is able to offer a limited number of sponsored rentals for this incredible adventure! It's important to note that the number of rentals covered will depend on the types of rentals available and will be offered as long as funding permits. However, you also have the option to rent directly from BOA or bring your own boat! More information is available on the registration page.

Upon completion of registration, we will be in touch to confirm rental arrangements.

We can't wait to share an incredible day on the water with you! Learn more and register at <https://bit.ly/2024SummerSplash>

**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.

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*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.*

# Making a Difference: Practical Actions That Individuals Can Take To Reduce Their Impact on Climate - Transportation and Electricity

**Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gases in the United States**, accounting for 31 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Here are a few suggestions for making changes:

- Walk, bike, take mass transportation or carpool whenever you can.
- When you need to replace your car, buy an electric vehicle, a plug-in hybrid, or a hybrid car. The IRA provides up to \$7,500 tax credit for purchasing an electric vehicle (EV). The EVs must be assembled in North America and there are requirements for where the battery is made and where the battery's minerals are mined in order to qualify for the full tax credits. Not all EVs are going to qualify for these tax credits. Appendix B (which can be found online at [wvhighlands.org/climate-change](http://wvhighlands.org/climate-change) has details on the EV tax credits.
- When driving a car avoid quick acceleration and control your speed, which can increase gas mileage by 33 percent. Make sure that your tires are properly inflated, use the correct oil grade, keep your engine tuned up, combine errands to make fewer trips, remove excess weight from your car, and use cruise control when appropriate.
- Minimize air travel and buy carbon offsets when you do travel by air (see, for example, [burnstoves.com/carbon-credits](http://burnstoves.com/carbon-credits)).

**The electricity generation sector is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the US.** Reducing energy produced by the burning of fossil fuels and promoting clean energy sources is central to our ability to impact climate change. Here are a few suggestions:

- Turn off lights when not in use and replace incandescent light

bulbs with LED lights.

- Buy ENERGY-STAR appliances. To earn ENERGY-STAR ratings, products must meet strict energy efficiency criteria set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or the U.S. Department of Energy.
- Replace a gas range with an electric range. By 2024, the IRA will provide a \$840 rebate for low-income households and a \$420 rebate for moderate-income households for the purchase of a new electric stove. See Appendix A online for details.
- Consider going solar. The IRA provides a 30 percent investment tax credit for installing solar and a 30 percent tax credit for installing batteries. These tax credits offset the significant upfront cost for going solar. Generally, in West Virginia, it will take 10 to 12 years to recover your initial investment in solar through reduced energy cost. Solar panels are generally guaranteed for 25 years and can last longer than that, providing "free" electricity for years. Solar United Neighbors, a nonprofit solar cooperative, brings together families interested in going solar with solar installers. They can also help your small farm or rural business go solar with a USDA REAP grant. See [solarunitedneighbors.org/westvirginia](http://solarunitedneighbors.org/westvirginia). Additionally, if you'd like to go solar on your own, there are several solar installers in West Virginia, and include:
  - \* Advancing Solar Solutions in Ripley. See [facebook.com/AdvancingSolarSolutions](http://facebook.com/AdvancingSolarSolutions)
  - \* Appalachian Renewable Power in Stewart, Ohio. See [cleanenergyauthority.com/ohio-solar-installers/appalachian-renewable-power-systems-ltd](http://cleanenergyauthority.com/ohio-solar-installers/appalachian-renewable-power-systems-ltd)

- \* DT Solar in French Creek. See [dt-solarllc.com](http://dt-solarllc.com)
- \* Milestone Solar. See [milestonesolar.com](http://milestonesolar.com)
- \* Mountain View Solar in Martinsburg. See [mtvsolar.com](http://mtvsolar.com)
- \* PIMBY Energy in Thomas. See [cleanenergyauthority.com/westvirginia-solar-installers/pimby](http://cleanenergyauthority.com/westvirginia-solar-installers/pimby)
- \* Pickering Energy Solutions in Parkersburg. See [sesllc.us](http://sesllc.us)
- \* Revolt Energy in Nitro. See <https://revolt-energy.com>
- \* SolarGreen in Charleston. Call 304-300-8470.
- \* Solar Holler in Shepherdstown. See [solarholler.com](http://solarholler.com)

There is an alternative for resi-

dential customers who cannot afford the upfront cost of installing solar. Residential customers may be able to purchase solar power from either the Appalachian Power Company (APCo), Monongahela Power Company (Mon Power) or Potomac Edison. These utility companies are developing solar facilities in West Virginia and are likely to make solar available in 2023 or possibly later. However, purchasing electricity through the utility solar programs is oftentimes more expensive than non-solar electricity offered by utilities.

**View our climate guide online at [wvhighlands.org/climate-change/](http://wvhighlands.org/climate-change/)**

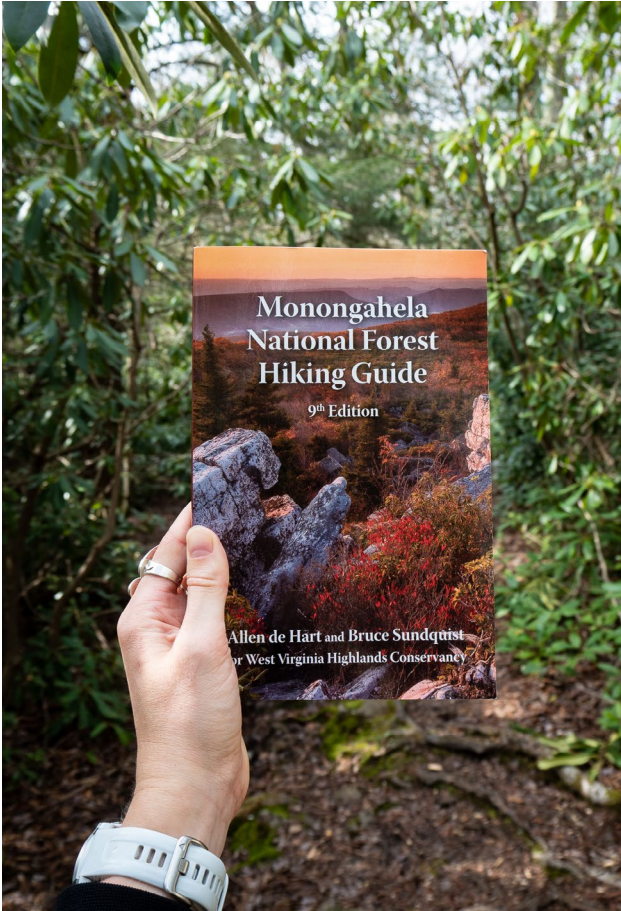
## Mark your calendars for WVHC's 2024 Fall Review!

**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. Join us to explore these topics at Cacapon Resort State Park on the weekend of Oct. 18-19! More details forthcoming.

# 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](http://www.wvhighlands.org)**

## Get your I ❤️ MOUNTAINS and WVHC gear at our online store!

Show your love for the mountains with our range of bumper stickers, cotton tees, hats, onesies, toddler tees and Hydro Flasks. Shop now at [wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org)



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