

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The Highlands Voice

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The Rest of Blackwater Canyon to Become Part of the Monongahela National Forest

By John McFerrin

The United States Forest Service has agreed to buy approximately 2,700 acres of land along the Blackwater River in Tucker County to add to the Monongahela National Forest. The land is in what is called an “inholding.” It is land that is within the original proclamation boundary of the Monongahela National Forest but was never acquired by the Forest Service.

Purchase of this Blackwater Canyon land will bring into public ownership one of the most scenic areas in West Virginia and will provide public access and outdoor recreational opportunities along a key five-mile stretch of



The Blackwater Canyon. (Photo by Frank Gebhard)

the Blackwater River that runs through Blackwater Canyon and includes a portion of the Blackwater Canyon Trail.

Much of Blackwater Canyon was already in public ownership. The land to be acquired is bordered by Blackwater Falls State Park and the Monongahela National Forest. Much of it is visible from the Lindy Point scenic overlook in Blackwater Falls State Park. This purchase means that the entire Blackwater Canyon will now be publicly owned.

The money to buy it will come from the Land and Water Conservation

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The Rest of Blackwater Canyon to Become Part of the Monongahela National Forest

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Fund. The Land and Water Conservation Fund is mostly supported by fees and royalties on oil and gas drilling offshore in federal waters. The purchase price is expected to be about 14 million dollars. The Forest Service's acquisition of the property is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has a long connection to Blackwater Canyon. There is a rail trail that runs along the boundary between what has long been Forest Service land and the land that the Forest Service is currently buying. WVHC has sponsored hikes along that rail trail.

Both because of Conservancy's direct connection with the Canyon and because of its specialness, getting the Canyon into public ownership has long been a goal of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

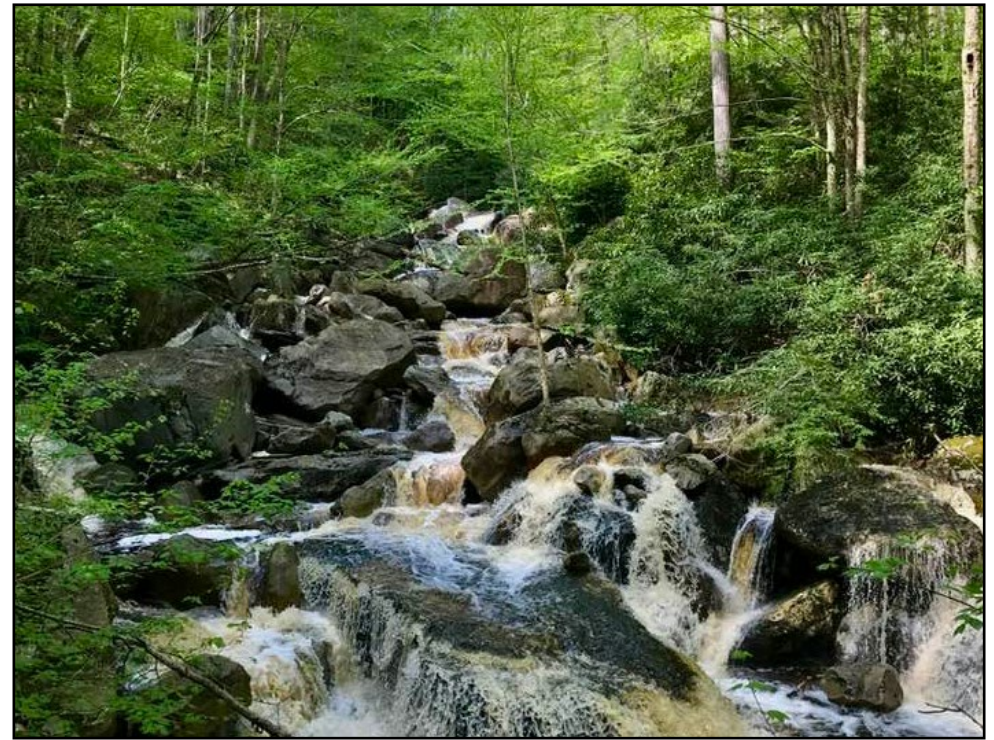
Before 1997, whether or not the Canyon was in public ownership or not did not make much difference, at least so far as the use of the property was concerned. The land was owned for decades by Allegheny Energy; it had originally purchased it with hopes of using the Canyon as a reservoir for a hydroelectric project. Allegheny Energy never pursued the project in any

major way so the land in the Canyon sat there. People happily used the rail trail. People walking down the trail barely knew that, if they looked one way, they were looking at Forest Service land. Turn their heads the other way they were looking at private land. The trees kept growing. There is no record of the wildlife ever noticing that some of them were on Forest Service land while their compatriots on the other side of the Canyon were on private land. They just kept enjoying their homes.

All this changed in 1997 when Allegheny Wood Products bought the property, and it became known that its plans for the property including timbering. The purchase price was five million dollars.

The reaction was immediate. A national conservation group offered to buy the land to protect it from timbering. The Sierra Club opposed it. The group Friends of Blackwater was founded primarily to oppose it. The Tucker County Development Authority opposed it.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy described opposition to the timbering as "our sacred duty." Our bylaws describe our purpose as "To preserve and protect areas of particular



Big Run as seen from the Blackwater Canyon Trail. (Photo by Lana Oaster)

scenic, geologic, biologic, and historic, wilderness and/or recreational importance in West Virginia." Nothing fit the bill better than Blackwater Canyon.

The fight to preserve the Canyon was semi-successful. With some encouragement from Senator Rockefeller, Governor Underwood purchased the Lindy Point scenic overlook and made it a part of Blackwater Falls State Park. Later, Governor Bob Wise oversaw purchase of some riverfront property to add to the Park. In later years, Senator Joe Manchin worked behind the scenes toward acquisition of the Canyon by the Forest Service. He was instrumental in reaching the recently announced result of the purchase of 2,700 acres.

At the same time, substantial timbering did take place.

It could have been worse. At one

time Allegheny Wood Products wanted to convert to a haul road the rail trail that ran along the boundary separating its property from Forest Service land. Widespread public opposition encouraged the Forest Service to oppose that proposal. The presence of the endangered West Virginia Flying Squirrel and Cheat Mountain Salamander (and the willingness of groups such as the Sierra Club and Friends of Blackwater to sue on their behalf) interfered with the timbering.

Now we begin a new chapter in the life of Blackwater Canyon. It is now all in public ownership. That was the goal of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and many, many others in 1997. Now it has been realized. The best time to protect a tree was 27 years ago. The second best time is today.

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.

Blackwater Canyon Trail Suffers Major Landslide

By Betsy Jaeger Lawson, The Sierra Club

One of the most popular hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing trails in West Virginia needs our help! The Blackwater Canyon Trail in Tucker County is a ten-mile former railway that connects Hendricks, southeast of Parsons, to Thomas. It recently suffered a serious landslide that needs more repair than trail volunteers can provide.

Until 1888, the canyon was wild and covered with immense spruce and hardwood stands. Then coal and timber tycoon Henry Gassaway Davis laid tracks through the canyon. Along the then-West Virginia Central and Pittsburgh Railroad line, three impressive cut-stone culverts were constructed, built with stone quarried from the “road cuts” made during construction. Most of the canyon was eventually clearcut, and by 1910 fires swept over the wasteland. Flooding and soil erosion left the area uninhabitable.

The Monongahela National Forest was established in 1920, bringing anti-erosion and reforestation projects to the area. Slowly, the canyon began to recover, and trees returned. The railroad became inactive in 1983 and was designated a hiking trail in 1989. The Blackwater River was recommended for “Wild and Scenic River” status in 1995. But then-owner Allegheny Power Systems refused to sell adjacent land to the Conservation Fund. Eventually, Allegheny Wood Products (AWP) became

the owner of 3,000 acres of the canyon.

Today the trail is the property boundary between Monongahela National Forest on the uphill side and land owned by Scenic Vistas, LLC on the downhill side. The landslide is at the stone culvert at Big Run Tributary, at Mile 4 on the downhill side. While Scenic Vistas, created by AWP, is the landowner, they are not obligated to maintain the trail. The historic and protected Blackwater Industrial Complex area, including the trail, is the responsibility of Monongahela National Forest. Unfortunately, they have failed to maintain it, leading to significant erosion from severe weather.

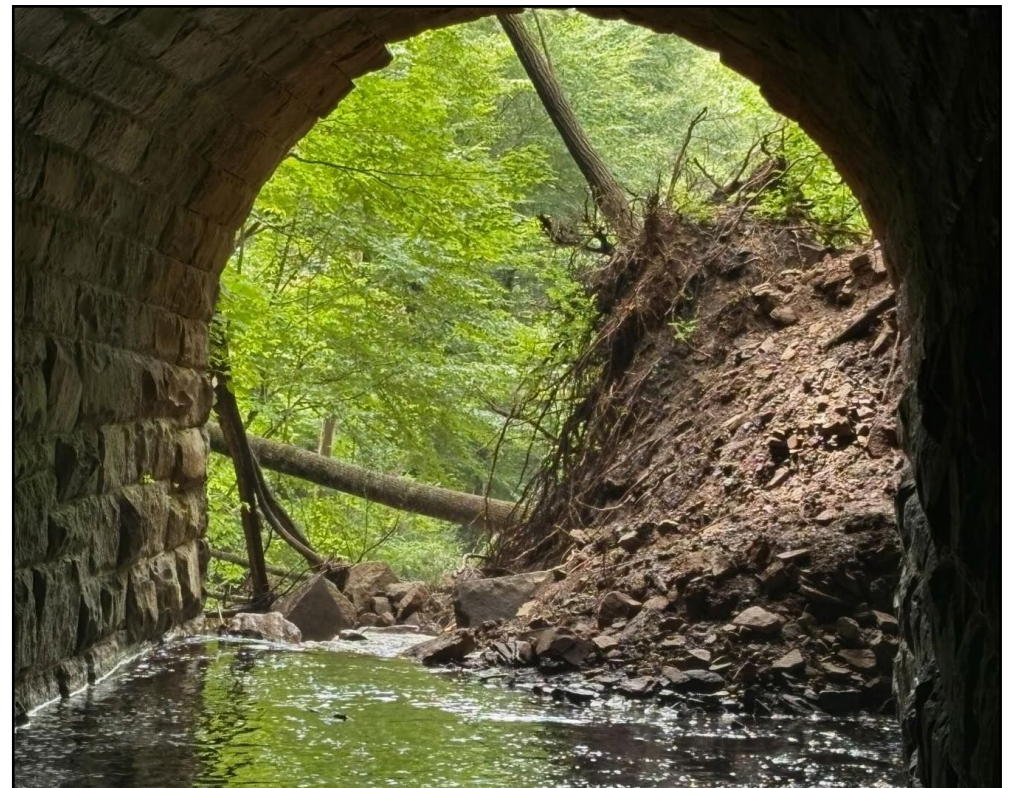
Coal and timber removal destroyed the canyon once. Now a highway, Corridor H, will intrude itself on the quiet and natural beauty of the canyon. The trail is essential to the local economy today, providing recreational opportunities for thousands of people each year. It is up to the Forest Service to repair this landslide and maintain the trail for the many people who use it.

Take action to protect the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail by sending a letter to the Forest Service today: <https://bit.ly/SaveBlackwaterCanyonTrail>

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in Mountain State Sierran Fall 2024 issue, the publication of the West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter.



Severe damage caused by the Big Run Culvert along the Blackwater Canyon Trail. (Photo courtesy Stephen Strother.)



Peering through Big Run Culvert along the Blackwater Canyon Trail. (Photo courtesy Blackwater Bicycle Association.)

Take action to protect the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail!

Send a letter to the Forest Service today: bit.ly/SaveBlackwaterCanyonTrail



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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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It's Getting Impossible to Beat the Heat

By Perry Bryant

If you think that it's been abnormally hot in West Virginia lately, you'd be right. Consider this summer in Charleston: June had 13 days with high temperatures over 90 degrees. And July had 16 days over 90 degrees with four days above 95 degrees. The number of days in June and July when the average daily high temperature in Charleston reaches 90 degrees? Zero, according to the National Weather Service. Even Elkins had 14 days in June and July when the temperature reached 90 degrees or hotter. Elkins average daily high temperature doesn't exceed 83 degrees for these two months according to the National Weather service.

This hot summer followed an unusually warm winter: half of Charleston's days in January and February had highs above 50 degrees. In Elkins, it was 22 days with high temperatures above 50 degrees in January and February. That's not a normal Charleston or Elkins winter.

It's not just Charleston and Elkins with warmer than normal weather. It's happening across the globe. June 2023 was the hottest June in recorded history. Followed by the hottest July ever recorded and the hottest August. Monthly heat records have been set for 14 straight months. And Earth's hottest day ever recorded occurred earlier this year on July 21st; only to have that record broken the following day, June 22nd.

What's causing this warming? Two things stand out. One, there has been a strong El Nino, which is a climate pattern of unusually warm waters in the Pacific Ocean. But that's only a small portion of the increase in the warming trend. The vast majority of the warming trend is from burning fossil fuels and their emission of greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases act like a blanket trapping heat in the Earth's atmosphere.

Unfortunately, climate skeptics are promoting several misconceptions about global warming. One is that humans haven't caused the Earth to warm. Bullpucky. The UN International

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's climate scientists, has found that human activity has "unequivocally caused global warming." And while several human activities contribute to global warming (for example, deforestation), it is "principally through emissions of greenhouse gases," that we are causing the planet to warm, according to the IPCC.

Nor is it correct to assume that the unusually warm winter and the scorching hot summer in Charleston is the "new normal." It's not the new normal, but rather just the beginning of ever-increasing temperatures unless there is a "deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions," which is the IPCC's reasoned recommendation. We're nowhere near that level of reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Another false claim by climate skeptics when discussing global warming is that the coal burned in the United States is the cleanest in the world. It's true that the Clean Air Act has resulted in substantial reductions in lead, sulfur dioxide and other criteria pollutants. But none of these regulated pollutants are greenhouse gases. When it comes to greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, John Amos and every other power plant in West Virginia uses the same emissions control devices that are used in China's coal-fired power plants: none. The coal-fired power plants in West Virginia and China simply discharge all of their carbon dioxide into the atmosphere unabated, as if to say, "What could possibly go wrong?" We are witnessing every day what could go wrong and our children will see even more clearly what could go wrong unless there is a "deep, rapid and sustained" reduction in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

We don't have to accept an ever-increasing warming planet. We can reap the benefits from transitioning to a clean energy economy with solar, wind and battery storage. "The (energy) transition represents an opportunity to build a more competitive U.S. economy, increase the availability of high-quality

jobs, build an energy system without the social injustices that permeate our current system, and allow those individuals, communities and businesses that are marginalized today to share equitably in future benefits."

This quote is not from the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy or

some other environmental organization, but rather from the nation's scientists – the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. When the scientific community speaks with such clarity, we should listen. Failing to heed their sage advice will be at our, and our children's, peril.

Federal Agency Petitioned to Curb Bird Collisions With Commercial Buildings

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy joined the Center for Biological Diversity, and 29 other bird and wildlife conservation organizations from 24 states filed a legal petition on Sept. 4, 2024, asking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a permitting process for commercial buildings to protect birds from deadly window collisions.

The petition proposes a permitting process under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that would require building owners to use proven measures to reduce collisions, such as films, curtains or others means that make glass visible to birds.

According to recent studies, buildings in the United States kill more than one billion birds each year. This problem has contributed to a roughly 30% decline in birds since 1970 – or an estimated three billion fewer birds gracing the skies in North America.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service can't keep letting buildings kill vast numbers of birds every year when there are known solutions to this tragic problem," said Tara Zuardo, a senior advocate at the Center. "Migrating birds are crashing into walls of glass that leave them broken and dying, and federal officials have a legal duty to push for basic preventative steps. As bird popula-

tions dwindle, this threat affects every American in every state, and it needs to be addressed."

In January 2021 the Service finalized a rule that upended decades of enforcement under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This unlawful reinterpretation failed to prohibit the foreseeable killing of migratory birds. In response to successful litigation by the Center and allies, the Service in 2021 revoked this rule and promised to issue regulations to address infrastructure known to cause bird deaths.

But in December 2023 the agency withdrew much-needed draft migratory bird protection rules, claiming that it requires an indefinite amount of time to pursue the rulemaking and left millions of birds vulnerable to building and window collisions.

The petition notes that the Service admits that building collisions are one of the greatest threats to America's migratory birds. These collisions are driving declines in warblers, sparrows and many other birds, including a number of sensitive species. That means the conditions leading to these collisions require regulation under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Service already administers a permitting process to reduce harm to bald and golden eagles, so it could also do so for migratory birds.

Mountain Valley Pipeline's Restoration Work Causing Even More Issues

By Dan Radmacher, *Appalachian Voices*

Though Mountain Valley Pipeline went into service in mid-June, construction continues on the route as contractors work to complete final restoration of the right-of-way — returning it as much as they can to its original contour, taking out silt socks, timber mats and other equipment, and installing waterbars and other permanent sediment-control fixtures.

According to landowners along the path of the pipeline and state regulators, MVP continues its documented history of shoddy work and water quality violations in this final stage of construction.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality recently hit the pipeline with \$30,000 in additional fines for water quality violations, while residents along the pipeline route have multiple complaints about the restoration work.

'MVP said no'

On Robert Jones' Montgomery County, Virginia, property, washouts have occurred where MVP only constructed waterbars — earthen berms planted with grass — to divert drainage across the 50-foot permanent right-of-way, leaving the rest of the 125-foot construction right-of-way unprotected.

In early July, heavy rain sent water and sediment rushing down the hill, tearing out sediment socks in the temporary right-of-way, clogging the rock-lined excavated depressions on the edges of the waterbars and depositing mud and dirt into nearby Mill Creek.

Jones' neighbor Lynda Majors, who helps the retired engineer monitor the right-of-way, discussed the problem with Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Director Michael Rolband and suggested that MVP should put the waterbars across both the temporary and permanent rights of

way.

"MVP said no," Majors says. "They said their contract is over at the end of August. I assume they meant the agreement with their restoration contractor, but MVP is responsible long after that."

MVP has removed bridges providing access for heavy machinery to the right of way, so cleanup of the July event wasn't easy.

"There were 12 guys with 5-gallon buckets who worked for five days," Majors says. "Afterward in Mill Creek, you could see blooms of sediment where fish swam. Mill Creek used to have a gravelly creek bed, but now much of that is covered."

'You can't prove it's us'

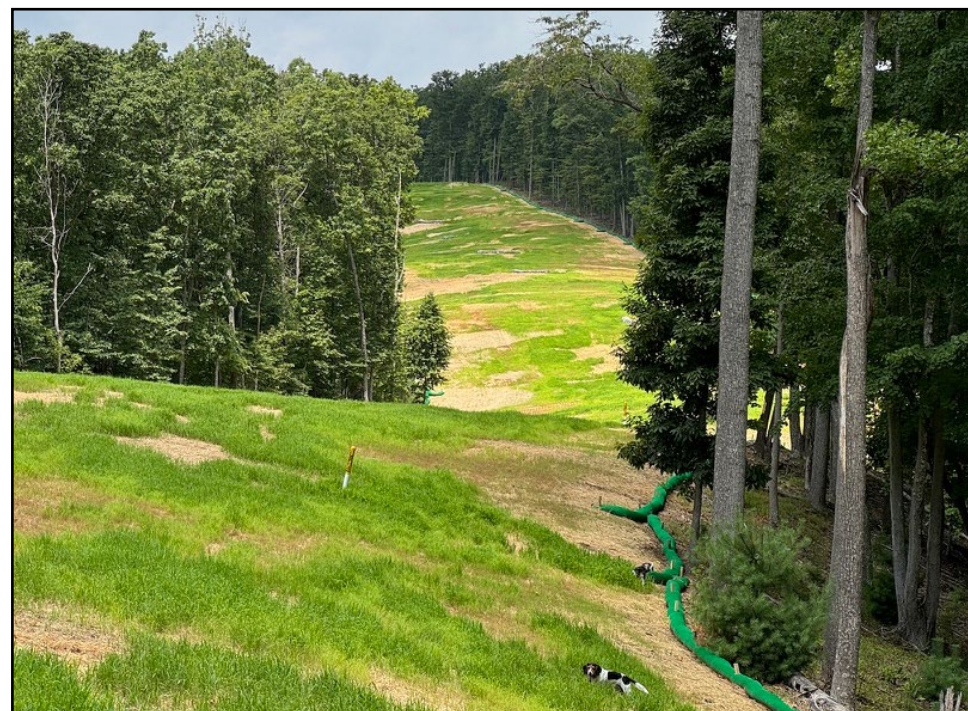
Amy Nelson, a history professor who retired from Virginia Tech two years ago, has been monitoring streams along the pipeline path. Yellow Finch Creek and Sinking Creek are two of the hardest-hit streams she's seen throughout construction, and the impacts haven't gotten any better as the company has worked on final restoration.

"There's a difference between 'the pipeline is complete and we're putting gas through it,' and 'we're finished,'" Nelson says. "That's a huge distinction that is lost in the public imagination."

A karst contamination event in February — sediment getting into an underground water body that MVP was apparently unaware of — fouled a nearby spring that then dumped sediment into Sinking Creek.

"They didn't do anything about it for seven days," she says. "We were used to having pristine or near-perfect water everywhere along the route upstream of Mountain Lake."

A major landslide near the road to Mountain Lake also caused problems in Sinking Creek.



This is what "final restoration" looks like along one stretch of MVP's right of way. (Photo by Dan Radmacher)

"They ran into all kinds of problems with that crossing," Nelson says. "It was nightmarish. It took five months [for MVP to bore] under that creek."

Repairing the hill was a major project.

"It looks like an amusement park mountain — all rebar and concrete," she says. "There is nothing natural about it anymore."

Sinking Creek is nothing like it used to be, and Nelson has little faith that MVP will do what's necessary to restore it and other impacted creeks, like Yellow Finch.

"Sinking Creek was a trout stream," she says. "It was a clean stream with no problems. The rocks now have an inch of sediment on them. It's normal for a stream to be muddy after rain, but a healthy stream will be back to normal in a day or two. Those sites we monitored along Sinking Creek, the water quality is just not okay at any of them anymore. MVP will say, 'You can't prove it's us,' but it wasn't like that be-

fore. They don't acknowledge they ruined those streams in the first place, and there's no effort to restore them."

According to Nelson, MVP has made lots of promises it has not kept.

"People were told, 'when we're done, you won't know we were here,'" she says. "That's not what they're doing. You can't blast the top off a steep slope and just put it back, especially when you've buried a 42-inch pipe bomb there. They are just taking lots and lots of shortcuts and becoming increasingly unresponsive."

'This is their responsibility'

Kathy Chandler, who lives on Bent Mountain in Roanoke County, Virginia, has also noticed MVP becoming less responsive as she has tried to get them to deal with problems left behind by their work — most notably on a narrow road that provides access to her property and a couple of neighbors' homes.

MVP used it as an access road —

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Book Review: Walk, on the Mountain by Junior Walk

By Cindy Ellis

When I was newly retired from teaching in public schools in West Virginia, I cast around for quite a while to find a pursuit for the energy that I still had. It was my extreme good fortune to be recruited to volunteer with the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

A birding friend recommended me, and I had some vague notion that there might be concentration on the conservation concerns known to those of us who wanted to protect habitat for birds, and everything connected to them. Although I grew up in the Mountain State, I did not know much about coal mining and its threats. I found that some of the other volunteers on the board of the Highlands Conservancy in the 90's and early 2000's were passionate about dangers to all the mountains in our state, including those in the areas of coal extraction.

Through them I visited some of those areas, met some of the heroes of resistance to the destruction of our mountains, and, in time, did my own small part in assisting with tours of a mountaintop removal site.

Someone I met was Junior Walk. Junior walks the walk and talks the talk. He is the real deal.

He grew up loving the hills around him, and with evolving feelings toward the coal companies that held sway in his part of southern West Virginia. His boyhood and youth might have been taken from pages of a novel...maybe Ann Pancake's "Strange as This Weather Has Been." Life was not like in "Leave It to Beaver" or "The Andy Griffith Show," or, more to his time, "The Wonder Years" or even "Roseanne." But Junior had a few mentors and a friend or two, and he persevered.

His recently published book, "Walk, on the Mountain; Not a Manifesto," is frank about the challenges he faced. It details how he came to his own good fortune of meeting coal ac-

tivist Judy Bonds and of eventually finding purpose and comradeship with the Coal River Mountain Watch. Now in his 30's, he pays much tribute to those who helped him, particularly to Judy, and to Larry Gibson, and he misses them very much.

In younger years, Junior was drawn to comic books, video games, and art. That's evident in his book. It is basically a beautiful and horrible picture book, with a graphic novel type text. It is horrible due to the scenes of the defilement of the mountains. And his writing sings, as if a reader could be listening to Junior talk and tell his story. One example:

"If you're ever out walking through the woods on a good and warm day and out of nowhere you smell the strong scent of cucumbers, get the hell out of there. That means there's a copperhead nearby, and they are terribly venomous.

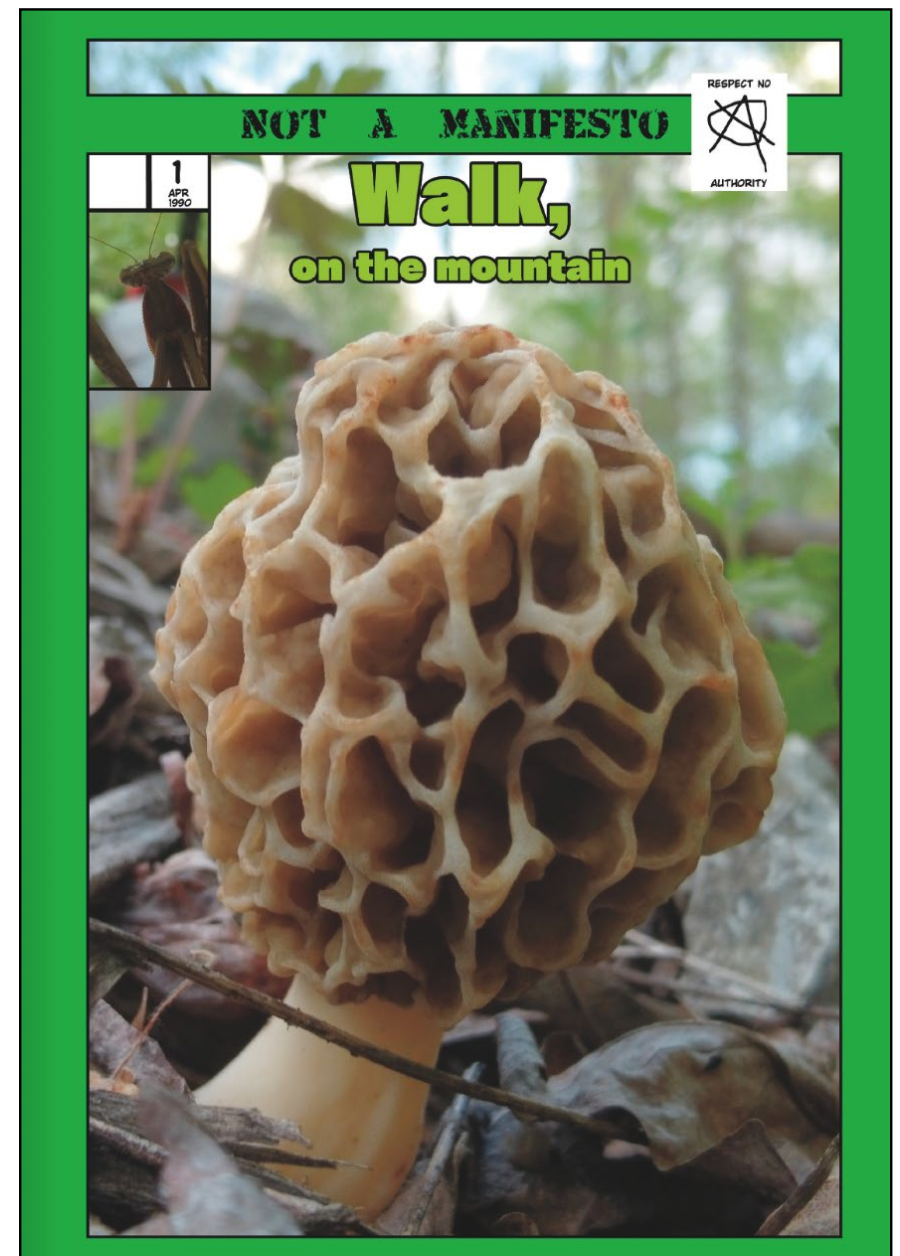
Likewise, if you're ever in a city and you see a group of men dressed in sharp, new suits walking into a building, chances are they're about to do more harm than any meager serpent."

When I read that passage in the book, I remembered my reaction to the tassel-loafer shod lobbyists at the West Virginia legislature and I leaped up to write this review.

Another quote: ***"Tulip Poplars being the tree we would always look for to do a tree sit. As they grow the tallest in the woods here."***

Despite the lyricism, and the manner in which the book gripped me, "Walk on the mountain" may not be for everyone. That's ok. He says things that need to be said. He honors some who need to be remembered. And Junior Walk has found some measure of peace...for himself and for the efforts he is determined to carry on.

"Walk, on the Mountain" is available from the printing platform Mixam.



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/

Impact of Highway Construction on Our Quality of Life and Our Economy

From the Go North Corridor H Alliance

The computer-generated simulated photos that WVDOH brings to our local information meetings and that appear on their website show a finished highway spiraling through the mountains, crossing high bridges ... and lined with fully grown trees. WVDOH does not bring actual photos of the construction phase of the project—a phase that can last for years, a phase that turns the landscape into a moonscape and causes confusion, delays, and devastation.

Those of us who drive from Thomas, WV to Elkins, WV on US Route 219 are familiar with the construction phase of Corridor H. We've experienced the closures and delays and have seen the devastated landscape. Documenting some of what we have seen is not to place blame, but to open up the discussion of what is really coming and discuss the potential impact of the construction phase on our quality of life, our tourism economy, and our livelihoods.

On the Elkins to Kerens section, we have watched a 1.5-year closure of a bridge to correct faulty abutment

design and reconstruction at Leading Creek in Randolph.

At Moore in Tucker County, the bridge has been under construction for seven years, closing one of our popular tourist destinations, the Allegheny Highlands Rail Trail between Montrose and Moore, for seven years, disrupting bicycle, pedestrian, and horseback travel between Parsons and Elkins.

Recently, on level ground in Holly Meadows near Parsons, a crane raising a large steel beam failed, and the beam crashed to the ground. Luckily, no one was hurt. The accident is under OSHA investigation; there will be unknown cost increases in checking the integrity and/or re-placement of the dropped beam and unknown construction delays.

During construction of the Kerens to Parsons section of Corridor H between 2017 and 2022, 51 violations have been issued based on 336 reported instances of non-compliance with sedimentation issues. The next section of Corridor H to be built is from Mackeyville to Davis. Everyone involved will agree that this section has the steepest

terrain, is the most difficult to construct, and is the most environmentally sensitive. Given the number of trout streams in this segment, and the steepness of the terrain, more violations and direct impact on the Cheat River can be anticipated.

On WVDOH's "preferred route," the ROPA, another high bridge over the North Fork of the Blackwater River between Coketon and Douglas is proposed. This construction will cross the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail, the most popular trail in the region, used by thousands of visitors every year and worth millions in revenue to Thomas and Parsons. Are we going to close this re-source for seven years?

If the Allegheny Trail closure at Moore for seven years is any indication of the WVDOH's attitude towards all trails—and by extension, towards the people who use them, the natural world, and our local economy—we should beware. We want an economy that respects our values rather than the economy of sprawl and destruction that rewards outside interests. The northern route has far less impact on



Go North

Corridor H

our trails and on Route 32, which can be a "greenway" between our towns.

Our thriving, homegrown, sustainable economy here on the mountaintop is based on our biggest asset: the natural world around us.

Misunderstood geology, incorrect assessments, faulty design, collapses, closures, and non-compliance—the impact of years-long highway construction can not be denied. Now is the time to question, evaluate, and discuss all the potential impacts on our daily lives (both short and long-term), our trails, and our environment before construction on this section of highway begins.

Through public participation and access to information, we must choose to protect what we have. Design versions can be challenged. Seven-year lapses can be revealed and avoided. The public needs to know the full story. A photograph of a completed highway lined with mature trees is not the whole story. Ask questions. Get answers!

Visit go-northcorridorh.org

Mountain Valley Pipeline's Restoration Work Causing Even More Issues *continued from page 6*

even though it was cutting through a wetlands area. They dumped tons of gravel on the road and put in timber mat bridges in a couple of locations to handle the heavy machinery coming in and going out.

After the pipeline went into service, MVP came in and pulled out a lot of the silt socks and one of the timber mat bridges. Chandler warned them that the road beneath the other bridge had been destroyed and the culverts

beneath it badly clogged by all the sediment coming off the pipeline right-of-way. Pulling up the bridge, she told them, would leave neighbors cut off and make it impossible for emergency vehicles to get through.

"Everybody told me to talk to somebody else," Chandler says. "I reached out to everybody and heard nothing back."

At one point, they suggested she could have a contractor repair the road

under the bridge.

"I don't have someone lined up to do the work," she says. "This is their responsibility."

When Hurricane Debby — by then a tropical depression — came through the region in early August bringing heavy rains, Chandler took photos of water rushing beneath the timber mats, but over the roadway and clogged culverts.

There are other problems on the

road. The portion on her property beyond a gate — which MVP broke and replaced — is now soggy and impassable, for instance. But Chandler hasn't heard anything from MVP in weeks.

"Now I'm thinking they're going to stick us with it," she says. "That's what it feels like, and that's not right."

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in *The Appalachian Voice*, the publication of *Appalachian Voices*.

WVHC 2024 Fall Review

Members and friends of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy: We are excited to invite you to our Annual Fall Review to explore and celebrate conservation efforts throughout the West Virginia Highlands at **Cacapon Resort State Park in Berkeley Springs on October 18-20.**

The West Virginia Highlands are a region steeped in rich history and natural beauty, with old and mature forests, scenic vistas, and diverse natural 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, it is essential to explore the region's past and present conditions, including its history, current conservation efforts, and how communities and local economies are responding to the ever-changing environment. Speaker sessions will explore these topics and more.

This year's Fall Review is a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow WVHC members, learn about our ongoing projects, and share your passion for preserving West Virginia's natural beauty!

Registration for the Fall Review is now open at <https://bit.ly/WVHCFallReview2024>

We look forward to seeing you there and making this year's Fall Review our best one yet!

Agenda

Day 1 - Friday, Oct. 18

- 6-9 p.m. Registration with networking, hors d'oeuvres, and music by All Grassed Up

Day 2 - Saturday, Oct. 19

- 9:30-9:40 a.m. Welcome with WVHC President Marilyn Shoenfeld
- 9:40-10:25 a.m. Session 1: Overview of the Highlands with Jim Van Gundy
- 10:45-11:40 a.m. Session 2: Mature and Old-Growth Forests of the Highlands with Ecologist Doug Wood and WVU Associate Professor of Biology Eddie Brzostek
- 11:40 a.m. - 1 p.m. Lunch
- 1 - 2:15 p.m. Session 3: Efforts to Conserve and Preserve the Highlands with WV Land Trust Executive Director Brent Bailey, The Nature Conservancy Director of Land Management and Stewardship Mike Powell, and West Virginians for Public Lands Coordinator Mike Jones
- 2:15-2:35 p.m. Break
- 2:35-3:20 p.m. Session 4: Corridor H: A 50-Year Battle to Protect the Highlands with WVHC Highways Committee Chair Hugh Rogers and Corridor H Alternatives founder Pam Moe
- 3:20-3:40 p.m. Break
- 3:40-4:55 p.m. Session 5: The Emerging EcoTourism Economy in the Highlands with Still Hollow founder Athey Lutz, Blackwater Outdoor Adventures owner Darci Macur, and Blackwater Outdoor Adventures Operations Manager Liz Moore

Day 3 - Sunday, Oct. 20

- 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. WVHC Annual Membership Meeting and Quarterly Board of Directors Meeting

Session Descriptions and Speaker Information

Session 1: Overview of the Highlands with Jim Van Gundy

Dr. Jim Van Gundy, author of "The Nature and Scenery of the WV Highlands" will provide an overview of the region: its history, geology, waters and unique ecosystems. The audience will gain deeper appreciation of why the WV Highlands are important sources of biodiversity and how they have demonstrated resiliency in the face of decades-long threats to their sustainability.

Session 2: Mature and Old-Growth Forests of the Highlands with Ecologist Doug Wood and WVU Associate Professor of Biology Eddie Brzostek

As scientific evidence mounts on the role that old-growth forests play in carbon sequestration and preserving biodiversity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for their harvesting to be justified for management reasons. Little remains of the virgin forests of West Virginia, and many across the nation are advocating for the conservation of "mature" secondary growth under the proposal in addition to "old growth." Join us as we seek to understand the nuances of old and mature forests, and the impact that the recent directive by the Biden Administration to conserve these ancient forests could have at home and nationwide.

Session 3: Efforts to Conserve and Preserve the Highlands with WV Land Trust Executive Director Brent Bailey, The Nature Conservancy Director of Land Management and Stewardship Mike Powell, and West Virginians for Public Lands Coordinator Mike Jones

At the heart of our work is the belief that we are not alone in our mission to conserve and protect the precious mountains and streams of the region. By working with a diverse range of organizations, we can bring together different perspectives and unique skillsets to achieve our shared goals. In this session, we will explore the work being done by various groups in the region and shine a light on their successes and challenges. Whether you're a seasoned conservationist or just starting to explore this critical issue, this session will leave you inspired and motivated to join the effort to protect the West Virginia Highlands for generations to come.

Session 4: Corridor H: A 50-Year Battle to Protect the Highlands with WVHC Highways Committee Chair Hugh Rogers and Corridor H Alternatives founder Pam Moe

As construction on the final two sections of Corridor H looms, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy continues to mobilize its members to advocate for thorough environmental review and compliance and a route that ensures the least environmental impact. This session will cover a brief history of Corridor H, including WVHC and partner group's opposition to the project, and dive into the complexities of the current struggle to route the highway away from unique cultural and natural resources in the Monongahela National Forest.

Session 5: The Emerging EcoTourism Economy in the Highlands with Still Hollow founder Athey Lutz, Blackwater Outdoor Adventures owner Darci Macur, and Blackwater Outdoor Adventures Operations Manager Liz Moore

As resource extraction and refinement began to decline, the Highlands region of West Virginia has shifted to an economy where communities can thrive from green energy and ecotourism. This interactive session will help better understand how local companies have made great movements toward a West Virginia economy supported by Ecotourism and Green Infrastructure: bringing together environmental, social, and economic cycles to revitalize local communities.

Register for the Fall Review at <https://bit.ly/WVHCFallReview2024>

2025 West Virginia Legislature Preview

By Luanne McGovern

The 87th session of the West Legislature will kick off on February 12, 2025. Since there will be a new governor in 2025, the Legislature “officially” kicks off on the second Wednesday in January, but it will then take a recess for 30 days for the new governor to prepare their legislative agenda and the proposed state budget. The Legislature will then meet for 60 consecutive days until mid-April.

Legislative Priorities for 2025

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy will again be partnering with the West Virginia Environmental Council to set legislative priorities and strategies for 2025. We will be meeting on September 14 at Tygart Lake State Park with other aligned organizations to exchange ideas and develop a key list of initiatives for the session. Everyone is welcome! Based on 2024, our priorities will likely continue to focus on these key topics:

- **Protecting public lands from myriad threats**
- **Community solar, alternative energy, and preserving net metering rules**
- **Community air monitoring and protecting citizen rights**
- **Orphaned oil and gas wells responsibility, changes to above-**

ground storage tank rules

- **Advancing Environmental Justice**

Unfortunately, it is difficult to predict what new and disastrous policies will surface during the 60-day session. The West Virginia Legislature is firmly in the hands of the Republican Party, and new mandates are routinely sent down from the national party for implementation in West Virginia. Our job will be to continuously monitor the introduction of new bills and work towards defeating them before they can advance.

How You Can Help: VOTE!

The 2024 election will decide extremely important state and federal offices for West Virginia: the US Senate, US House of Delegates, Governor, the State Senate, and the House of Delegates. With Jim Justice (R) running for US Senate (defeating Alex Mooney in the primary), the 2nd Congressional District is up for grabs—Riley Moore (R) is running against Steve Wendelin (D).

Patrick Morrissey is the Republican candidate for governor, running against Steve Williams, Mayor of Huntington. If Morrissey is elected, he is likely to be a much more active and aggressive governor than Justice. As West Virginia Attorney General, he has made a name for himself, bringing lawsuits against

the Environmental Protection Agency, fighting against clean water, clean air, and climate change mitigations.

In 2024, the West Virginia Legislature contained only three Democratic Senators and 11 Democratic Delegates out of a total of 134 members (10%). It is possible that this “super-minority” may shrink even further in 2025. Supporting your local Democratic candidates is critical to ensure some opposing voices at the Capitol. If you are a resident in the eastern panhandle, two former West Virginia Environmental Council lobbyists are running for the House of Delegates – Lucia Valentine (97) and Maria Russo (100).

It may seem daunting, but please get out and vote and make your voice heard. Early voting starts on October 23 and runs until election day on November 5.

Get Involved!

There are many ways that you can help before and during the Legislative session:

- Help us set priorities, either by attending the meeting in September or just sending us your thoughts.
- Volunteer to be part of the WVHC

Legislative Committee. We are always looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help monitor the session and provide lobbying and support for our efforts.

Contact your elected officials on a regular basis, either in person, by phone, or by email. They are elected to work for you and, in most cases, will at least listen when citizens contact them. It can seem intimidating at first, but personal contacts and personal stories can be very effective at influencing legislators.

Keep updated on key issues on a timely basis. WVHC will be issuing Action Alerts and requests for support throughout the session. Since the session is only 60 days long, time is always of the essence.

Attend committee meetings and legislative sessions and visit your legislators in person. Most of the sessions are also available online. The West Virginia Capitol building is extremely accessible, and it is quite simple to call your Legislator’s office and request a meeting. In-person is the most effective!

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

Are you on our email list?

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.

Sign up today at bit.ly/WVHCemailsingup



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

Be Involved

According to data from Princeton University, 30 percent of the reduction in greenhouse gases as result of the IRA will be individuals taking action: installing heat pumps, buying EVs, etc.

That's important, but it leaves 70 percent that will need action from utility companies, oil and gas companies, and the state's Public Service Commission.

Individually, we can't achieve these changes, but collectively, we can. Being a member of and contributing to organizations such as the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (wvhighlands.org) is among the most important actions each of us can take. Other West Virginia organizations that are work-

ing on the climate crisis include the West Virginia Environmental Council (wvecouncil.org) that lobbies the state legislature on solar and other energy policies and the West Virginia Rivers Coalition (wvrivers.org).

Nationally, we need organizations that will advocate for the Environmental Protection Agency to develop strong regulations requiring the oil and gas industry to promptly fix leaks of methane, and requiring utility companies to drastically cut their emissions of carbon dioxide, and establishing strong fuel efficiency standards that promote EVs.

• Giving Green (givinggreen.earth), a nonprofit research organization, has identified national, nonprofit

organizations that have a proven record of working to address the climate crisis. They have selected several organizations as being effective at promoting climate change solutions and are worthy of donations. These include:

- o Evergreen Collaborative (collaborative.evergreenaction.com) a more liberal, climate action policy organization.

- o Clean Air Task Force (catf.us) a more conservative climate action policy organization, and

- o Carbon 180, (carbon180.org) an organization that focuses on carbon removal practices and technology.

Be Involved: Join and donate to these organizations so we can make systemic changes to reduce green-

house gases.

We hope you find these suggestions helpful. We can all have an impact on climate either for the better or for the worse. Thinking about how the energy we use is produced and taking steps to reduce energy produced from burning fossil fuels is critical if we are going to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. It is going to be a difficult transition from burning fossil fuels to producing clean energy. It is incumbent on all of us to adopt meaningful changes.

View our climate guide online at wvhighlands.org/climate-change/

BECOME A WVHC MEMBER

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Membership categories (circle one)

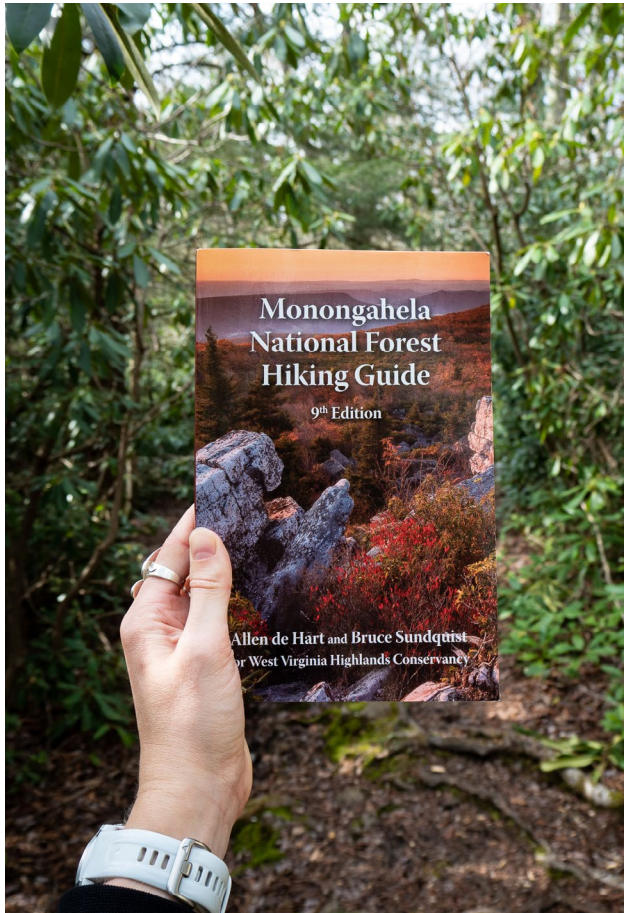
	Individual	Family	Org.
Senior	\$15		
Student	\$15		
Introductory	\$15		
Other	\$15		
Regular	\$25	\$35	\$50
Associate	\$50	\$75	\$100
Sustaining	\$100	\$150	\$200
Patron	\$250	\$500	\$500
Mountaineer	\$500	\$750	\$1000

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

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

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.

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

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



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