

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The Highlands Voice

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West Virginia Nature Conservancy Acquires Dobbins Slashings Adjacent to Dolly Sods Wilderness Area

The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia recently acquired 1,393 acres, known as Dobbins Slashing, adjacent to Canaan Valley/Dolly Sods, that will protect an area of world-class biodiversity and connect nearly 80 miles of trails in this recreational area.

TNC will keep the property, sold by Western Pocahontas Properties, as a flagship preserve to conserve and manage the biodiversity, rich sphagnum bogs and headwaters of Red Creek. In addition to biodiversity conservation of this important land, TNC will work to enhance tourism and recreation. This property adds to the current preserve



(Photo by the West Virginia Nature Conservancy)

complex that already includes the iconic Bear Rocks Preserve and the Allegheny Front Preserve. The property will play an important role in connecting nearly 80 miles of trails in this popular recreation landscape.

Dobbins Slashing has been a target property for TNC and the conservation community for decades due to its high-elevation wetlands, unique biodiversity, headwater streams and location within a significant climate corridor, which is important for plants and animals moving in response to climate change. Its position within the Appala-

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New Coloring Book Celebrates the Unique Creatures of the WV Highlands



The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is excited to announce the release of *Coloring the West Virginia Highlands: Exploring the Flora and Fauna of the Region*, a beautifully illustrated 20-page coloring book by Appalachian artist Natalie Kovacs (@shapelessflame).

This unique project highlights the diverse wildlife and ecosystems of the Highlands, featuring native species like

the wood turtle, northern red flying squirrel, hellbender, and candy darter, alongside scenes of mushrooms, ramps, and industrious beavers. Perfect for kids and adults alike, the book invites you to explore the interconnected wonders of the natural world while fostering a deeper connection to the environment.

Just in time for the holiday season, this coloring book makes a thoughtful

and educational Christmas gift for nature lovers of all ages. Whether you're shopping for a curious child, an outdoor enthusiast, or someone who simply appreciates art, this book is sure to inspire joy, creativity, and a renewed appreciation for the beauty of the Highlands.

Proceeds from the coloring book will support the many worthy causes and projects of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. Your purchase helps us continue our work protecting

and preserving the region's wild places, making this a gift that gives back to nature.

This project was brought to life with the generous support of the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area. We are immensely grateful to Natalie for her exceptional artistry and dedication to this project.

You can order your copy online at wvhighlands.org for \$13 + \$5.38 shipping.

Thoughts From Our President

As I sit by my window, gazing out at a brownish-green horse pasture, I can't help but marvel at the unpredictability of the season. We've already weathered two blizzards, tallying over 30 inches of snow, yet it seems to melt away as quickly as it arrives. Who knows what the rest of this winter will bring?

This uncertainty mirrors the challenges we face as environmental advocates. In these times, we must come together, strengthening our collective voice and deepening our alliances. It's a moment to prepare ourselves—not just mentally, but also with purpose and determination—for the challenges ahead. Threats to our air, water, forests, parks, and other natural resources are not just persistent; they are proliferating.

We've stood together to defend our environment in the past, and now it's time to do even more. Every one of us has a role to play. This is no time to wait for others to act—we all must step forward. Whether it's sharing your

thoughts, engaging through social media, participating in our committees, or providing financial support, your involvement is vital. We'll be sharing more ways for you to help in the coming months because every effort counts, and every member of our community is needed.

As the year winds down, let's also remember to embrace the beauty and joy of the season. From all of us at the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, we wish you a warm, happy holiday filled with peace, purpose, and—if you're lucky—a cat!

Thank you for being part of this journey and for everything you do to protect the places we all hold dear. Together, we will continue to make a difference.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Shoenfeld
WVHC President

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.

TNC in West Virginia Acquires Dobbins Slashings

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chians, a focal landscape for TNC, also makes its protection of utmost importance to increase impact and progress toward TNC's ambitious 2030 goals to slow climate change and biodiversity loss.

This property also adds to the Resilient Connected Network (RCN) of lands. TNC is working to create a network of lands across the United States with unique topographies, geologies and other characteristics that can withstand climate impacts.

"TNC has a vision to conserve the resilient and connected Appalachian forest landscape as quickly as possible, safeguarding the rich biodiversity of the region, tackling climate change by enhancing forests' ability to absorb and store carbon and ensuring that both people and nature benefit," says Thomas Minney, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in West Virginia. "When we are successful, the impacts

of completing projects like Dobbins Slashing will leave positive, lasting impacts for nature and people well into the future."

The Dobbins Slashing property is the primary connector between the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and the Monongahela National Forest's Dolly Sods Wilderness. The headwaters of Red Creek originate on this tract that comprises the largest peatland wetland in the Sods. These types of peatlands are the most efficient carbon sinks on the planet because the peat absorbs more carbon dioxide than it releases.

This property is also one of the largest privately owned wetlands in Central Appalachia with over 800 acres of high-quality, high-elevation acidic bog habitat. The wetlands act like a sponge and help absorb large rain events and allow water to drain slowly to help regulate flooding events. The flood attenuation qualities of the wet-

land rank in the top seven percent in importance for West Virginia. These high-elevation wetlands also contribute to clean and healthy water for downstream communities. The water quality benefits these wetlands provide rank in the top one percent in West Virginia by the West Virginia Wetland condition score.

"The Dobbins Slashing tract has been desired to be in public agency or long-term conservation ownership since at least 1970 when the property was considered as the upper storage installation of the Davis Power Project," says Mike Powell, director of land management and stewardship. "Protection of this property will allow for stream, wetland, forest management and restoration, and provide public access to this scenic and important site."

Once finished, the trails on Dobbins Slashing will provide important connections for the area's current trail

system.

"Existing trail networks in the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area and Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge will be connected to provide continuity of nearly 80 miles of public trails," continues Powell. "This will provide more options for visitors and residents that want to engage in cross-country exploration between these public lands. Although difficult to get to, Dobbins Slashing will be a destination for the curious and adventurous explorers that regularly recreate in the area."

While Dobbins Slashing is not open for recreation yet, TNC is currently developing its recreation plan for the property. Plans for a spring celebration are underway. This project was made possible through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Wardensville, Thomas and Davis Await WVDOH Corridor H Review

From the Go North Corridor H Alliance

Background

The West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) plans to issue environmental documents soon on two remaining sections of the controversial 100-mile Corridor H—and they are indicating that the Wardensville section will be first in the line of fire.

The 100-mile Appalachian Development Highway, as conceived in the

1960s, originally aimed to connect I-79 at Weston, West Virginia, with I-81 near Strasburg, VA. The 68-mile stretches of Corridor H that have already been built or are in progress (Elkins to Parsons and Davis to Wardensville) cost almost \$2 billion. The remaining two sections (Parsons to Davis and Wardensville to the Virginia state line) will cost another billion.

WVDOH officials expect to release an Environmental Assessment soon for the 6.8-mile section in Hardy County from Wardensville to the Virginia border. For the 10-mile stretch from Parsons to Davis, WVDOH plans to issue an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before the end of the year. Both documents require approval from the Federal Highway Administration before construction can begin. Local activists are

prepared to make their voices heard.

We'll be sharing information on how you, too, can submit your comments on these projects. Public input is critical, as it ensures that community perspectives are considered in decisions impacting the environment and local character. Your voice can make a difference in shaping the future of our region.

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West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

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- WVHC Cotton Hat (Black or Army Green): \$22.50
- WVHC Hemp Hat (Black or Green): \$25.00
- WVHC 100% Cotton T-Shirts (Coyote Brown, Kelly Green, Navy Blue, Black) Available in XS-XXL: \$22.00
- Black 50th Anniversary T-Shirt with "Celebrating 50 years" logo. Available in Small-XXL: \$20.00
- I Love Mountains T-Shirt Short Sleeve. Available in M-XXL: \$18.00
- I Love Mountains T-Shirt Long Sleeve. Available in S, M, L, XL: \$22.00
- I Love Mountains Toddler T-Shirts. Available in 18-months, 2T, 3T, 4T, 5/6: \$20.00
- Square Black Bandana: \$5.00

Please include \$5.50 shipping for Apparel items

Drinkware

- WVHC Hydro Flask 20 oz. All Around Tumbler (Birch, Indigo, Black): \$35.00 + \$5.50 shipping
- WVHC Hydro Flask 21 oz. Standard Mouth Flex Cap Water Bottle (Pacific, Mesa, Indigo): \$45.00 + \$5.50 shipping

Stickers

- 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
- Fighting to Protect the Highlands: \$15.95 + \$4.87 shipping
- The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands, 2nd Edition: \$29.95 + \$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

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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What's Happening with Solar Power?

By John McFerrin

Although nobody knows for sure, there could be action in the 2025 West Virginia legislative session that makes solar energy more or less attractive or available. There is currently a proposal to Appalachian Power to change net metering practices for its customers. Currently it is before the Public Service Commission although the Legislature may weigh in. There will probably be a proposal to provide for community solar as well.

A little history and the current state of the law

Since 2007, electricity which is bought and sold between utilities and consumers has had the same price, no matter who is doing the buying or selling.

The buying and selling took place between utility companies and customers who produced their own electricity. The process is called net metering. Homes and businesses with solar panels remain connected to the electricity grid. At night and during the bleak midwinter they would be taking more electricity from the grid than they produced. During the day and especially during the summer they would be adding electricity to the grid. No money changes hands. The power company credits the customer when it is delivering electricity and uses those credits to offset times when the customer is using electricity from the grid.

Up until now (but not much longer) the price of electricity was the same whether the customer was buying from the power company or selling to the power company.

Last year, First Energy (Mon Power and Potomac Edison) asked the West Virginia Public Service Commission to change the price of electricity, depending upon who was doing the selling. The retail price of electricity is about 13 cents per kilowatt hour. First Energy suggested that the rule change so that, instead of pay 13 cents per kilowatt hour, it pay about 6 cents. There were letters of protest, negotiations, etc. before the Public Service Commission reached a compromise: Starting

in January 2025, electricity purchased from the power company would cost 13 cents per kilowatt hour. Electricity sold to the power company by a customer would be worth 9.3 cents per kilowatt hour.

Customers who connect to the grid before Dec. 31, 2025, would continue to receive 13 cents per hour for the electricity they sell to the power company.

What's happening now

These changes only apply to customers of First Energy. Customers of Appalachian Power who have solar panels are still selling to Appalachian Power at the full retail rate of 13 cents per kilowatt hour.

Appalachian Power wants to change that. It has asked the Public Service Commission to dramatically reduce the rate at which it pays for electricity produced by customers who have solar panels.

The most likely result is that the Public Service Commission will adopt the compromise rate of 9.3 cents per kilowatt hour as the rate that utilities pay for power purchased from consumers. It could decide to keep the current 13 cents per kilowatt hour rate. It could decide something else. It could adopt a lower figure. It has, however, plowed that ground with First Energy and will probably do the same with Appalachian Power.

If the Legislature gets involved, all bets are off. It could pass a statute requiring that electricity sold by the customer have the same price as electricity bought by the customer, the current 13 cents per kilowatt hour rate. It could adopt some other rate. The most likely result is that it will not get involved. Unless some business, person, or group steps forward to make this a legislative issue, it will probably assume the Public Service Commission will take care of it and it does not have to.

Customers who wish to take advantage of current more favorable rates have to move quickly. First Energy customers only have until the end of December 2024, to be grandfathered in at the current rate. When the Public

Service acts upon Appalachian Power's request, Appalachian Power customers who wish to use solar power will very likely be given a date by which they must be connected to continue to get the current rate.

Community Solar

The other solar related issue that could come up at the Legislature is community solar.

Community solar allows entities with big roofs—a business, a parking garage, a church, a medical center—to install solar panels on those roofs and then sell the power that it doesn't use. For example, a business with a big roof and no shade trees anywhere nearby could cover that roof with solar panels. With such a big roof, it would produce more electricity than it needed. It could then sell the right to use the excess.

Community solar would not be restricted to existing roofs. It could be constructed as a free-standing entity. People could buy shares in the electricity produced by a free standing community solar operation just as they would in one installed on an existing rooftop. If West Virginia allowed community solar, freestanding community solar operations would probably be more common than those on big roofs.

In addition to the legal barriers, there would be the practical problem of having to string wires, etc. to deliver the electricity. Instead, the excess electricity produced would go back into the electrical grid. Consumers would buy shares of the excess electricity produced by the business, the church, etc. They would then be credited on their electric bills in proportion to the shares they owned in the community solar operation.

This opens up the possibility for

all manner of people to have solar power who cannot have it now. Even though renters do not their own roofs where they could install their own solar panels, they could buy shares of the electricity produced from some big building or freestanding entity. Those who lived in shady spots where solar panels are not possible could buy shares. Those who could not afford the upfront investment in solar panels could buy shares.

It also opens up the possibility of savings for consumers. Estimates are that consumers could save about ten per cent on their electric bills by enrolling in community solar.

Even if this sounds like a good idea, it can't happen in West Virginia under existing law. In West Virginia, electricity is sold by regulated monopolies (Appalachian Power and First Energy). They are regulated by the Public Service Commission which sets rates and controls most aspects of their operations. As regulated monopolies, they control the poles, wires, etc. that a community solar operation would need to distribute electricity to its members.

This is where the Legislature comes in. Before community solar can become a reality in West Virginia, the Legislature would have to change the law. It would have to authorize community solar and require the Public Service Commission to adopt rules setting out how the monopolies it regulates (Appalachian Power and First Energy) would have to cooperate with community solar operations.

Bills to authorize community solar were introduced during the 2022, 2023, and 2024 sessions of the West Virginia Legislature. They did not pass. There will almost certainly be a similar bill introduced in 2025.

Send Us a Post Card, Drop Us a Line, Stating Point of View

Please email any poems, letters, commentaries, events, etc. to the Voice editor at jordan.howes@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.

The Regional Red Spruce Restoration Project

By Rick Webb

Today, the red spruce forest of West Virginia's Allegheny Highlands is but a fragmented, mostly second-growth remnant of the forest that existed before industrial-scale logging began in the late 1800s. Although estimates vary, only about 10 percent of the 1,000,000 acres of original red spruce cover remain. The decimation of this forest had and continues to have, significant negative impacts on ecological and watershed integrity in the Highlands.

The Forest Service proposes to develop a regional-scale red spruce restoration project, including national forests in West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. This is an important proposal that deserves the close attention of those who advocate for the Highlands. This article highlights some of the concerns that have arisen during the initial review process.

The Forest Service published the public announcement (Scoping Letter) for this proposal on August 6, 2024, and provided an opportunity for public comment. As required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) will be completed, and an additional public comment opportunity will be provided before final project decisions are made. The DEA is expected to be completed in 2025.

The Forest Service intends to conduct a NEPA analysis that will "outline various red spruce restoration practices and address multiple vegetation management techniques to create favorable conditions for red spruce . . ."

As a preliminary step for this analysis, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) convened a Red Spruce Technical Advisory Board (RSTAB) to provide expert and science-informed technical recommendations on red spruce ecosystem restoration methods and impacts. The RSTAB included partici-



Gaudineer Knob in the Monongahela National Forest. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

pants associated with multiple government agencies and non-governmental organizations involved in red spruce restoration, including the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI). The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC), a long-time CASRI partner, was represented on the RSTAB.

The RSTAB report, Red Spruce Restoration Recommendations, was published on June 11, 2024. It includes information and recommendations for a range of red spruce planting and release practices. It also includes a dissenting statement provided by the WVHC (Appendix 2). That statement is provided here (references are to sections of the RSTAB report):

Statement by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The WVHC representatives on the RSTAB appreciate the opportunity to take part in the early development of

information for use in the USFS Region 8 Subregional Red Spruce Restoration Environmental Assessment (EA). We are encouraged by the dedication and intelligence brought to the red spruce restoration issue by the other RSTAB participants.

The purpose of the RSTAB report is to provide "expert opinion and science-informed technical recommendations on red spruce ecosystem restoration methods and potential impacts to help inform the NEPA contractor." (Section 1.1) We want to caution the NEPA contractor concerning several topics included in the report that require additional focus in the EA.

Use of Herbicides and Ecosystem Risk: The RSTAB report describes the use of herbicides to control competing vegetation when planting red spruce and to achieve canopy release. The report states: "Where possible partners recommend the use of herbicides over

solely mechanical methods given fewer safety concerns, greater treatment efficiency, and time efficiency." (Section 4.5.2) The WVHC does not recommend the use of herbicides in the National Forest.

The report further states that "In the long term it will be critical to assess the fate of herbicides on vertebrates and in watershed and soils." (Section 4.5.2) The WVHC contends that the best available scientific information concerning the fate and both direct and indirect effects of herbicides applied in Central and Southern Appalachian red spruce forests needs to be described and evaluated prior to prescribing herbicide use. This issue should be addressed in the EA.

Commercial Timber Harvest: The RSTAB report provides multiple recommendations or prescriptions for achieving red spruce restoration objectives

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WVEC's New Voice at the Capitol: Meet Kasey Russell

By Kasey Russell, WVEC

Hi, I'm Kasey Russell, your new West Virginia Environmental Council lobbyist! I am very excited to represent our partner groups and members at the State Capitol at monthly interims and the regular session. I'm originally from Atlanta, Georgia, and attended forestry school at the University of Georgia in Athens. I moved to Morgantown in 1996 (my first husband went to West Virginia University's law school) and then to Charleston in 1999. I fell in love with the state and happily raised two kids (now 25 and 22) in Charleston.

I was very active in my kids' school and their activities; I also ran three statewide nonprofits (at different times) and lobbied at the West Virginia State Capitol for about 13 years. My second husband and I moved south to Brunswick, Georgia, in 2020. Sadly, he passed away in January 2024, and West Virginia is calling me back. I plan to be back in Charleston full-time early next year.

I have been active in the environmental movement for decades. My focus has included improving recycling, access to walking and biking, local food sources, water and air policies, city parks and green spaces, and forestry practices. I was a member of the Charleston City Council for two terms and served for six years on the Kanawha County Solid Waste Authority.

I ran the West Virginia Land & Mineral Owners Council for several years and worked for an engineering company specializing in coal, timber, and gas lands. During this time, I introduced my clients to a different, more environmentally and community-friendly way of doing things. I had some success, but more importantly, where I find myself now, I formed long-lasting relationships with all types of people.

Learning about the WVEC lobbyist position felt like it was my destiny



to return to my second home. I look forward to working on issues I'm passionate about, like clean air, clean water, renewable energy, smart use of our resources, etc. I love working with legislators and their staff to find common ground to ensure our priorities are heard. Hopefully, we will be able to influence policy and continue to see that West Virginia is a fantastic place to live, work and play. I can't wait to get started.

The Regional Red Spruce Restoration Project

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in conjunction with commercial timber harvest. The report acknowledges that "To achieve restoration objectives and have a project result in a net positive ecological outcome, impacts from commercial spruce release need to be minimized and mitigated for where unavoidable." (Section 4.5.3) The WVHC is concerned about how prospective ecological outcomes will be characterized, evaluated, and compared in the EA. The benefits of red spruce restoration components of management projects involving commercial timber harvest will need to be weighed against ecosys-

tem damage associated with the timber harvest, including loss of biomass, soil damage, hydrologic alteration, and aquatic ecosystem degradation.

Ecosystem Approach to Restoration: The WVHC supports the RSTAB report's emphasis on the need for "a thorough environmental baseline assessment emphasizing environmental factors associated with spruce-fir ecosystems, including soil properties, hydrologic integrity, terrestrial and aquatic habitat and biota." (Section 1.3) The WVHC contends that a baseline assessment, including identification of the extent and causes of ongoing degradation to soils and streams associated with the red spruce ecosystem, is an essential first step if regional red spruce restoration is to be efficient and effective. This type of analysis should properly appear in the EA.

This is the first in a series of articles that will follow the proposed Red Spruce Restoration Project as the planning and

Wardensville, Thomas and Davis Await WVDOH Corridor H Review

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The Road to Nowhere

Environmentalists and local residents in the Wardensville to Virginia state line section have long questioned the need for a four-lane through the sparsely populated Potomac and Allegheny Highlands, known for their pristine streams, steep slopes, and diverse plant and animal species.

In fact, Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) vetoed its 15-mile portion of Corridor H during the last round of environmental hearings in 1995, and CTB spokesman Marshall Herman told the Charleston Gazette in January 2024 that Virginia still has no plans to build it. Shenandoah County and the town of Strasburg is-

sued resolutions reaffirming their opposition in 2022.

Thus West Virginia's four-lane portion of Corridor H would end on top of North Mountain. Opponents call the project a "Road to Nowhere."

Nevertheless, Governor Jim Justice, who has just been elected to replace Joe Manchin as a West Virginia U.S. Senator, WVDOH Highway Commissioner Jimmy Wriston, and West Virginia U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito, continue pushing to build to the state line, claiming an increase in traffic would force Virginia to build its section. The traffic volume on Route 55 now stands at less than 5,000 vehicles daily, which normally would not justify a four-lane highway.

What's at stake

Three historic tourist towns—Thomas, Davis and Wardensville—have developed thriving tourist economies in recent years. Many of their business people do not want to bulldoze the historic sites, rivers, and forests, which attract people to the area to shop, dine, hear live music, and enjoy skiing, biking, and hiking.

In Davis and Thomas, environmentalists and businesses formed a "Go North" coalition to oppose WVDOH's Preferred Alignment (known as the ROPA), which would build a conspicuous bridge across the Blackwater River and cut a swath dividing the twin towns. They want the corridor to go north around the town of Thomas—a plan that has been favored by state and federal environmental agencies.

But in the Wardensville section, the group Stewards of the Potomac Highlands opposes building Corridor H at all. Passing lanes on Route 55, they say, are what's needed to help motorists get over North Mountain more quickly and safely.

This section of Corridor H would disturb trout stream tributaries of the Cacapon River, the George Washington National Forest (including several rare and endangered species), and the area's

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The Definition Of...

By Bob Henry Baber

Despite numerous mining citations and legal violations, South Fork Coal continues to destroy thousands of pristine acres in and around the Monongahela National Forest Proclamation boundary.

It continues to pollute the South Fork of the Cherry River and to endanger the exquisitely colored, rare candy darter trout.

But by far the most serious consequence of strip mining in the Greenbrier County high country is the growing danger of flooding to the at-risk people of Richwood.

The June 23, 2016, Thousand Year Flood devastated the town. Nursing home residents died in the aftermath of the destroyed facility, and 100 jobs were permanently lost; two schools were destroyed, and they have not yet been replaced; 100 homes, stores, streets, the water intake, and the sewer lines in the Cherry River were annihilated. For a half year Richwood's raw sewage flowed directly into the Cherry

River and on into Summersville Lake

The costs, not including human suffering, which continues to this day, easily exceeded \$50 million dollars. Per capita, it has been one of the most expensive events in FEMA history.

There is no doubt that the vast stripping in the watershed dramatically contributed to the disaster. Yes, the North Fork of the Cherry River—coming out of the forest—flooded, but the South Fork coming off desolate, unreclaimed land absolutely raged. How could it have been otherwise? It couldn't.

Still, we are now almost a decade later, and the stripping and polluting continue unabated.

This....is...insanity.

It all started around 1945 when a man named Maust from, ironically, Scarsdale, New York first stripped Coal and Blue Knobs. It was ruin-and-run stripping—ringing around the mountains. In its wake, high walls were left along with shale and acid ponds. But by

today's standards, they were mere fingernail clips, and nature did its best to heal the scars.

But the strippers had a toehold, and in the 1980's they returned—ostensibly to “reclaim” what Maust had left. It was a ruse to get more coal. Hardwood timber was bulldozed and buried, the plug on the self-cleansed lakes was pulled, and the cuts to the mountains grew exponentially.

Peter Moran, the superintendent of the mines, proclaimed it would all be put back “better than it was.” He stated the topsoil scraped from the surface would be spread on the removed layer of “the cake” and trees would be planted and would thrive. Of course, neither happened.

Fingernail clips had morphed into outright amputation.

Let me tell you about what was lost. This land had huge Colorado-like boulders covered with lichens and soft, green, moist moss from the beginning of time. It was soft to the touch. Cherry,

Oak and Maple trees abounded. The air was scented with their presence. Clear headwaters silently seeped downward. This was “National Geographic” land—photogenic and stunning.

Now...it is all gone. Every. Single. Bit.

What's left is smoothed over rubble and spindly grass, roads, and pitiful tiers of scarred and sculptured mountains...turned into human mole hills: ugly and depressing to behold. And beneath that facade—the real danger of a decapitated watershed remains. And toxic water continues leaching into the rivers.

For the candy darter and the beautiful people of Richwood the risk of pollution and the next Thousand Year Flood loom ever greater with each passing day, each mine explosion, and each gouge of the blade.

Truly, this....is...insanity.

West Virginia Rivers Coalition Taking Chemours to Court

On Dec. 5, 2024, the West Virginia Rivers Coalition Inc. (“WV Rivers”) filed a lawsuit against The Chemours Company FC, LLC (“Chemours”) for ongoing and dangerous violations of the Clean Water Act at its Washington Works facility. This legal action underscores WV Rivers’ unwavering commitment to protecting public health and West Virginia’s waterways from the harmful impacts of hazardous PFAS chemicals.

Chemours has consistently failed to comply with the discharge limits prescribed by its Clean Water Act permit,

allowing excessive PFAS pollution into the Ohio River. Despite a Compliance Order issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2023, these violations have continued unabated.

Autumn Crowe, WV Rivers Deputy Director, stated: “PFAS contamination poses a direct threat to public health and our waterways. Chemours has had ample time to comply with its discharge permit, yet these violations persist. This lawsuit is our response to the company’s refusal to prioritize clean water and public health.”

Taking the helm as WV Rivers’

new Executive Director, Jennie Smith, commented: “In 2024, it is outlandish for a corporation to continuously flout the Clean Water Act and state water quality standards. Chemours’ actions show a disregard for the law and the health of our communities. Our coalition is standing firm, demanding accountability, and working to ensure that corporations like Chemours are held to the highest standards of compliance.”

PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are known as “forever chemicals” because of their persis-

tence in the environment and links to severe health impacts, including cancer, liver damage, and developmental issues. This lawsuit seeks injunctive relief and civil penalties to ensure compliance and prevent further harm to West Virginia’s waterways.

Smith concluded: “Our rivers and communities deserve better. This legal action sends a clear message: no one is above the law, and no one can jeopardize our health and environment without consequences. Together, we will safeguard clean water for generations to come.”

2025 WV Legislature: What's in Store?

By Luanne McGovern

The upcoming legislative session is shaping up to be a challenging time for all West Virginians who love the environment. With the Legislature set to convene on Feb. 12, 2025, the new Governor and the super-majority House and Senate have plenty of time to align their legislative priorities.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and the West Virginia Environmental Council will be monitoring the situation closely, but the year promises to be a constant defense against the worst new policies. Based on past experience, bills are likely to be introduced very quickly at the outset of the session and passed by suspension of constitutional rules.

Election Recap

West Virginia's transition to a fully Republican state is complete. All the major elections were won handily by Republican candidates, and Democrats lost three legislative seats. All of the margins of victory were substantial:

- **President:** Donald Trump – 70%
- **U.S. Senate:** Jim Justice – 69%
- **Governor:** Patrick Morrissey –

62%

- **Congressional District 1:** Carol Miller – 66.4%
- **Congressional District 2:** Riley Moore – 71%

Additionally, four long-serving Democratic legislators opted to retire in 2024:

- **Sen. Mike Caputo (District 13)**
- **Sen. Robert Plymale (District 5)**
- **Del. Ric Griffith (District 27)**
- **Del. Larry Rowe (District 52)**

We thank them for their service.

While Joey Garcia successfully defended Sen. Caputo's seat, the three other seats flipped to Republican control. This leaves only two Democratic senators and nine democratic delegates among the 134 total legislative seats—an 8.2% representation. A Republican supermajority indeed.

Legislative Priorities for 2025

Our priorities for the upcoming session remain unchanged and aligned

with previous years. With even smaller Democratic majorities, introducing new legislation will be harder than ever. The key, as always, is to get the appropriate committees to consider legislation so it can be sent to the House and Senate floors for a vote.

Public Lands Protections

If last year is any indication, we can expect new efforts to exploit our beautiful natural areas. Last year, an out-of-state timbering company lobbied for legislation to prevent “wildfires” in our state parks. West Virginia experienced the worst drought in years in 2024, and there were no significant fires on state lands, so hopefully, logic will prevail, and this bill will not be resurrected in 2025.

West Virginia is in the process of receiving “primacy” from the federal Environmental Protection Agency to control the permitting of carbon sequestration injection wells. This means the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection can approve well permits directly, without federal approval. Since the passage of SB162 in

2023, these wells can be installed under “state forests, natural and scenic areas and management areas.” The upcoming session is sure to contain plenty of surprises and calls to action.

Community Air Monitoring

HB5018, introduced in 2024, sought to restrict the use of citizen-collected air monitoring data against polluters. It is likely to reappear in 2025. As more and more citizens install monitors at their homes, this citizen-sourced data is valuable and timely information that can be used to pinpoint pollution sources. We encourage our members to consider installing or sponsoring a PurpleAir Monitor in conjunction with the West Virginia Citizen Action Group. For more information, visit their website: wvcag.org

Stay Engaged

The 2025 legislative session is expected to bring surprises and urgent calls to action. Stay connected with us through the coming months as we continue to explore other priorities and find ways that you can help. We are all in this together!

BECOME A WVHC MEMBER

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

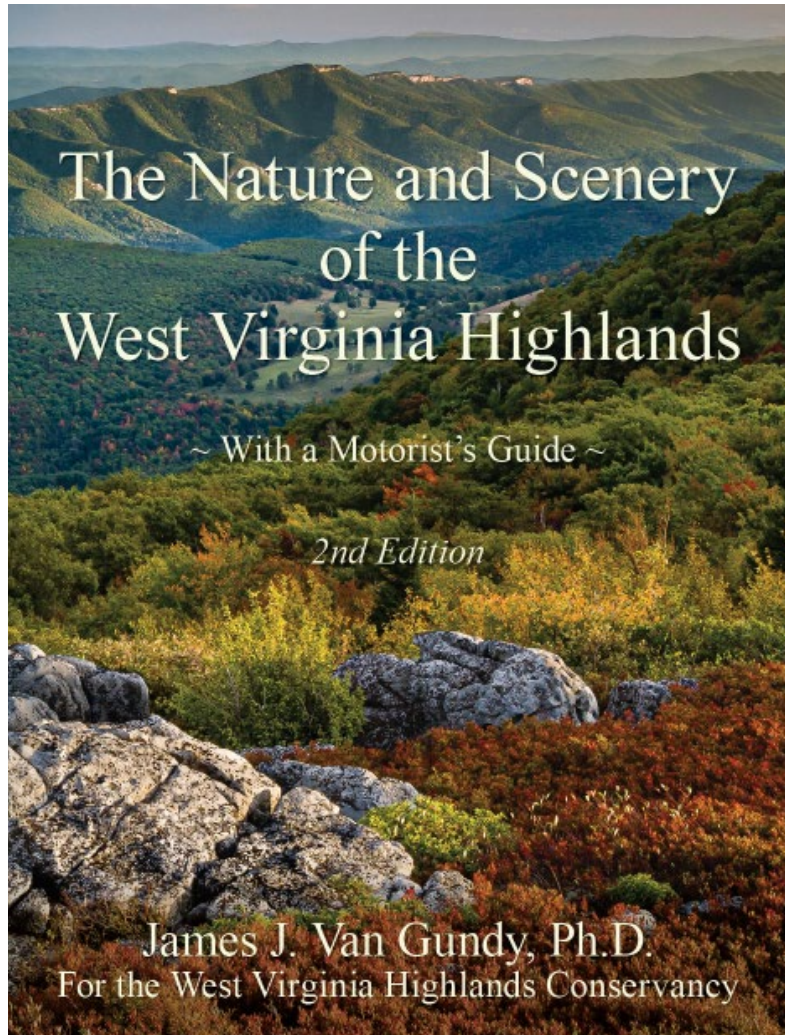
Membership categories (circle one)

	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

Discover the Hidden Wonders of the Highlands: Second Edition of The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands Now Available!



We're thrilled to announce that the second edition of Jim Van Gundy's celebrated book, *The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands: With a Motorist's Guide*, is now available for purchase on the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's online store! This eagerly anticipated release combines decades of Jim's passion and knowledge with newly added scenic routes, expanded natural history sections, and stunning photographs by Kent Mason.

Originally self-published in 2022, Van Gundy's guide sold out due to high demand over its initial release period. Now, *The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands* returns with even more ways to explore this beautiful region. Organized into two parts, the book begins with a comprehensive look at the region's natural history, covering geology, ecosystems, flora, fauna, and human impact. Following this is a detailed *Motorist's Guide* through 33 scenic highway segments, each packed with insights on must-see locations, historical sites, and scenic turnouts that will delight both local residents and out-of-state adventurers.

For those who love the Highlands or are eager to uncover its secrets, this book is an ideal companion. *The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands* is designed to complement our popular *Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide*. While the *Hiking Guide* gets you exploring on foot, Van Gundy's guide takes you deeper into the Highlands by car, offering a window into the forces that shaped its unique landscape, its rare wildlife, and its cultural history.

Whether you're tracing the route of the Cheat River, marveling at a dark sky in Watoga State Park, or taking a detour to the Cranesville Swamp, this book brings the Highlands to life with every page.

Order your copy today from our online store and prepare to set out on an unforgettable journey. Every purchase helps support the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's mission to preserve the beauty, character, and ecological health of the Highlands for generations to come!

Send **\$29.95 plus \$4.87 shipping** to: **West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321** OR order from our website at wvhighlands.org

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/WVHCemailsignup**

Friends of the 500th Present the 11th Annual Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Calendar



The Friends of the 500th are proud to release the 11th edition of their annual calendar, featuring stunning photographs of the Refuge and surrounding areas. Local photographers capture the beauty and wildlife of Canaan Valley, making this calendar a perfect keepsake or gift.

Available at the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Bookstore or by mail from Marilyn Shoenfeld (marilyn.shoenfeld@gmail.com) for \$15.00 plus shipping, it is a wonderful way to remember the Valley and plan your next visit!

The Friends of the 500th, established in 1996, is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, the nation's 500th National Wildlife Refuge. Through collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and community members, the organization advances conservation, education, and recreational initiatives, relying on members for financial support and volunteer efforts.

Wardensville, Thomas and Davis Await WVDOH Corridor H *continued from page 7*

sensitive karst limestone/sandstone terrain, including the recharge area for the Town of Wardensville's main water source. The Town of Wardensville has filed detailed comments with WVDOH regarding their concerns.

West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection has already reported over 50 construction violations, damaging both private lands and the Monongahela National Forest,

in the section from Kerens to Parsons currently being built in Randolph and Tucker County.

Stay tuned for your chance to comment on WVDOH's environmental impact documents in Tucker and Hardy County. It's your tax money and your roads. We'll do our best to keep you informed. Learn more at northcorridorh.org

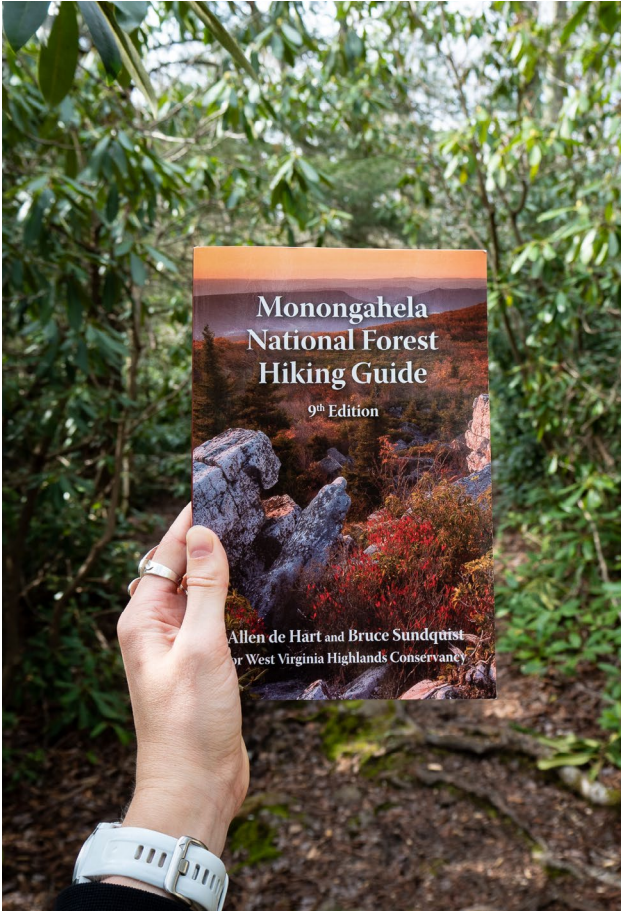
Keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful: Your year-end gift makes a difference!

For nearly 60 years, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has stood strong, working to protect West Virginia's environment. Together, we've proven that individuals can create powerful change—and the call to protect our mountains, forests, clean air, and water has never been more urgent.

Our mission is alive, and so is our drive to keep West Virginia wild, healthy, and thriving. Join us in this cause. Become a member or consider donating today to make a real impact—because West Virginia's future depends on all of us. **We have work to do. Are you ready to stand with us? Visit wvhighlands.org to make a donation or become a member!**

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

