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# *The Highlands Voice*

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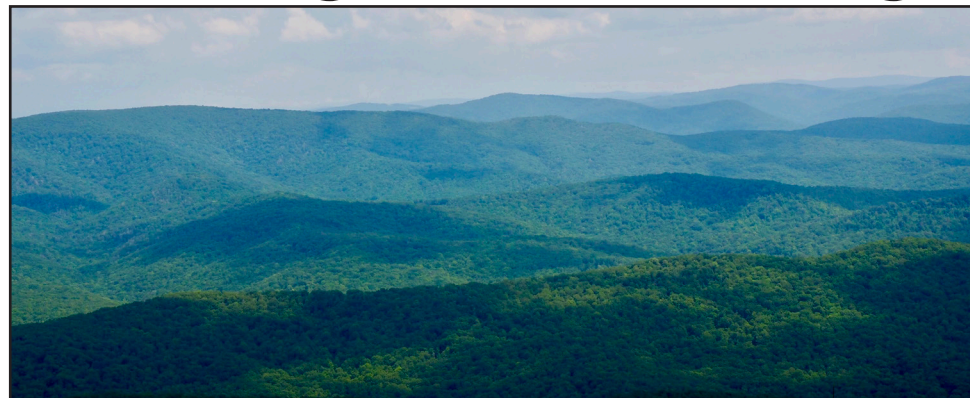
April 2026

## **WVHC joins national lawsuit to defend endangerment finding**

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has joined a national lawsuit challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's repeal of the 2009 endangerment finding, a key legal basis for federal action on greenhouse gas pollution. Earthjustice filed the case on behalf of WVHC and a coalition of environmental groups and Alaska Native tribes from across the country.

The endangerment finding may sound technical, but its purpose is straightforward. It is EPA's determination that greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare. As Perry Bryant explained in a recent Highlands Voice article, that finding laid the foundation for regulat-



ing greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act after the Supreme Court's 2007 decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA*.

In February, the Trump EPA rescinded that finding. The agency dropped the scientific grounding that supported the original finding and instead leaned on economic and legal arguments to justify the rollback.

For West Virginia, this issue hits close to home, as the state has faced repeated flooding, strained water systems, and an already vulnerable power grid under growing stress from climate impacts.

The rollback is especially troubling here because West Virginia Attorney General JB McCuskey publicly supported EPA's move. EPA quoted McCuskey praising the

repeal and saying he was "proud to work with Administrator Zeldin" on removing the mandate. McCuskey helped lead the effort from Republican attorneys general to support the rollback.

This repeal ignores settled science and weakens one of the federal government's most important tools for addressing greenhouse gas pollution. If allowed to stand, it would undermine protections meant to safeguard public health and leave communities like ours more vulnerable.

At its core, this case is about whether EPA can walk away from its responsibility to protect people from the harms of climate pollution. WVHC is joining this fight to help make sure it cannot.

### **What's inside:**

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# WV House Speaker representing data center-linked developer in Mason County air permit appeal case

By Caity Coyne, West Virginia Watch

**WV Citizen Action Group calls for Hanshaw to resign from all legal cases related to developers in the state who could benefit from legislation he's passed.**

West Virginia House Speaker Roger Hanshaw is representing a second data center-related developer against a community group that is seeking to appeal an air quality permit previously approved by the state Department of Environmental Protection for a development in Mason County.

Hanshaw, an attorney with the Bowles Rice law firm, filed a notice of appearance in the appeal to the DEP's Air Quality Board on Feb. 12. One week later, the state House of Delegates passed legislation directing how the Department of Commerce will certify new high impact data centers and microgrids in the state and what information developers are required to provide for certification.

A spokesperson for Bowles Rice confirmed via email on Thursday that Hanshaw is assigned to the Mason County case, where he and two other attorneys are representing the developer MGS CNP1, LLC, which is an affiliate of Houston-based Fidelis New Energy. The West Virginia Citizen Action Group is seeking the appeal.

The news comes one week after Country Roads News, in Tucker County, reported that Hanshaw would be defending data center developer Fundamental Data against



House Speaker Roger Hanshaw, R-Clay, stands at the podium in the West Virginia House of Delegates. Hanshaw has now been linked to two separate cases where he's defending data center-linked developers against citizen advocacy groups in air permit appeal cases in Tucker and Mason counties. (Photo by Perry Bennett/West Virginia Legislative Photography)

an air quality permit appeal filed by the grassroots coalition Tucker United in the state's Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Hanshaw started working on the case on March 16, two days after the 2026 regular session ended.

Hanshaw is currently seeking re-election to his seat in the House of Delegates, where he represents Clay, Calhoun and Braxton counties. He does not have a Republican challenger for the May primary.

In Mason County, CAG is appealing an air quality permit that was approved last year for the construction of a biomass and carbon-capture facility in Point Pleasant. According to public filings with the DEP, that facility — which is just one part of a very complicated cam-

pus, dubbed the Monarch Campus, planned by several companies and industries that will include data centers — plans to burn wood chips to generate electricity that won't be for sale to the grid.

Morgan King, climate manager for WV CAG, said Hanshaw's decision to work on the Mason County case is a "massive conflict of interest." As speaker, Hanshaw holds a lot of power in the House of Delegates, she said. He's instrumental in passing legislation like House Bill 2014, the 2025 bill that started the state's certified microgrid and data center program.

While it's not illegal for Hanshaw to represent organizations that may benefit from bills approved by the House of Delegates, King

said it is alarming.

"There are plenty of laws in place that are permissible, but that doesn't make them right or ethical," King said. "That's CAG's biggest concern — we see these conflicts of interest time and time again that our legislators don't stand up to or fix. [The House and Hanshaw] approved the tax credits, the loose regulations, the rules for [developers]. Now he's working as their lead counsel."

Ann Ali, communications director for the state House of Delegates, said Wednesday that Hanshaw could not comment on the clients he represents through his law firm.

A spokesperson for Bowles Rice declined to comment for this story.

Michelle KupperSmith, the executive director of the government watchdog group Campaign For Accountability, said it was concerning to see one of the highest ranking legislators in West Virginia working on an appeal for a company that stands to benefit from legislation he passed.

"The status of state legislators as part-time state employees with zero restrictions on what their actual jobs that pay the bills can be, breeds an unfortunate level of corruption. This situation appears no different," KupperSmith said. "Best practice for state legislators is that they have caps on outside earnings and also restrictions on the kinds of investments that they are allowed to make to ensure there are no conflicts of interest between private jobs and holdings and the very important matters

*Continued on page 5*

# Go North newsletter: A special place

By Go North Alliance

This month's newsletter focuses on input from our community on why our mountaintop is a special place. We asked members of the Go North Alliance and our community the question, "Why is this place special to you." A sampling of their answers is below:

"I love the close by wonders of our woodland trails, waterfalls, rivers, mountains and hollows and on clear nights viewing stars and planets. I love the rich history of our small towns and the great community of people here."

"Unlike the strip malls and strip mines that define where I live near Morgantown, Thomas is authentic, has a great art scene, natural beauty, and everything that made me decide to stay in West Virginia 50 years ago."

A native of Canaan Valley, I've traveled a bit nationally and internationally & seen outstanding natural resource areas. The Blackwater River watershed is among them. A precious, incomparable place. ROPA will destroy it. No ROPA."

"I can walk out my back door and be in the wild... in seconds!"

"Blackwater Canyon is special to me because it is an Ark of rare species, and a peaceful refuge from city life. Around it have grown up



Aerial shot of Lindy Point looking up the North Fork in Blackwater Falls State Park. (Photo by Frank Gebhard)

welcoming restaurants, charming shops, opportunities for hiking and wildlife viewing on trails plus inviting overnight hospitality."

"Because it is peaceful and beautiful."

"Once immersed in Tucker County's wild beauty, I begin to wonder if I've accidentally traveled back in time. That feeling reminds me that all of America's 'lost' natural wonders can be found again; they only need proper protection and a little bit of time."

"Wilderness with a history!"

"Having grown up in Eastern Tucker County I learned early on to appreciate the beauty of our forests, crystal streams such as Slip Hill Mill Run, the uniqueness of Big Run Bog, the colors of the changing seasons and the magnificence of our crown jewel the Blackwater Canyon, as well as the cooler climate. I returned to Thomas after retirement to enjoy our wonderful treasures on top of this mountain."

"Walking for miles and miles in complete solitude, surrounded by indescribable beauty."

"...strong community culture... pride in being rural...close but not too close...gorgeous natural landscape never gets old...a world of beautiful micro climates within our county's boundaries."

We're betting that everyone reading this has their own answer to that question. Friends of Blackwater is giving you an opportunity to tell the world why you love Thomas, Davis, and the surrounding areas, and why you favor a northern route for Corridor H. They have begun a grassroots digital campaign to let our legislators know about this existential threat to the Thomas/Davis area, and they would like you to be part of it! By using the link below, you can help broadcast our message, whether you're posting a favorite picture on Facebook or sharing what you love about Tucker County on Instagram. You may even be featured in future ads! If you have any questions, email [loki@saveblackwater.org](mailto:loki@saveblackwater.org). To be part of the campaign, go to <https://app.sosha.ai/toolkit/go-north-0ec>.



## 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.

## West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

### Apparel

- 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 \$6.25 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 + \$5.38 shipping
- Fighting to Protect the Highlands: \$15.95 + \$5.38 shipping
- The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands, 2nd Edition: \$29.95 + \$5.38 shipping

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

## BUMPER STICKERS

To get free I ♥ Mountains bumper sticker(s), send a SASE to P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV, 25321. Slip a dollar donation (or more) in with the SASE and get two bumper stickers. Businesses or organizations wishing to provide bumper stickers to their customers/members may have them free.



## Roster of Officers, Board Members and Committee Chairs

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ENDOWMENT FUND COMMITTEE: Larry Thomas

FINANCE COMMITTEE: Larry Thomas

FALL REVIEW COMMITTEE: Jackie Burns

RIVERS COMMITTEE: Susan Rogers Rosenblum

HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: Hugh Rogers

GRANTS COMMITTEE: Andrew Young

DATA CENTER COMMITTEE: Luanne McGovern

CLIMATE CHANGE: Vacant

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## WV House Speaker representing data center-linked developer in Mason County air permit appeal case

*Continued from page 2*

that they're legislating on for the people of West Virginia. That's not what seems to be happening here."

The only piece of data center legislation passed during the 2026 Legislative session was a rules bundle directing how the state Department of Commerce should certify data centers and microgrids that would qualify for an expedited regulatory process and fewer regulations generally than other developments.

In the House, lawmakers — including Hanshaw — voted down an amendment to the rules that would have increased reporting requirements for developers, limited water usage, returned some power back to local governments and added other guardrails to alleviate concerns voiced by residents for the past year.

Under rules for the state's House of Delegates, lawmakers who have a "direct personal or pecuniary interest" in matters being voted on should request a Rule 49 ruling from the House Speaker or "presiding officer" before voting. If the lawmaker is part of a class of more than five individuals, they are allowed to vote. Hanshaw did not



West Virginia Governor Morrissey signs House Bill 2014 into law on the Mountaineer GigaSystem & MCC microgrid site. (Photo by Monarch Compute Campus)

request a Rule 49 ruling on the data center rules bundle.

King said that CAG will explore whether or not to file a complaint with the state's Ethics Commission regarding Hanshaw's involvement in the Mason County development. In Tucker County, community leaders have said they plan to do the same for his work with Fundamental Data. Per the Ethics Commission, state law bars complaints being filed against candidates running for public office during the 60 days before an election.

"We believe that Speaker Hanshaw should immediately resign from all the cases he's handling related to industrial development and other developments that he has played a hand in advancing legislatively. He should not be their counsel," King said. "The message the Legislature is sending to constituents about all these developments is that they will benefit from them, but [the developments] are really only benefitting people in power and wealthy stakeholders, both in and outside of the state."

## Thoughts from our President

Spring is trying very hard to break through the cold, but with some success, it will be very welcome.

I want to remind everyone of the mission of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy:

We "promote, encourage and work for the conservation — including both preservation and wise management — and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the nation." That includes advocacy, education, preservation and protection of our natural world.

So, what exactly does that mean? We focus on many issues, from lawsuits to outings, from hiking guides to coloring books, from student seminars to wilderness hikes, and much more. Our activities span a wide range, which is very challenging. Please support our efforts in this difficult time and help us protect our natural world.

A recent development is the national lawsuit against the EPA to overturn its removal of the "endangerment finding," which is the basis of climate change law. WVHC is the plaintiff representing the state of West Virginia. You will learn more about the lawsuit on the first page of this issue.

To pivot to education, we have had three successful screenings of the short film produced by WVHC — "Dolly Sods and the Legacy of Helen McGinnis." This film depicts Helen's early adventures in Dolly Sods — defining trails, cre-



Blooming spring bluebells. (Photo by Olivia Miller).

ating maps and swimming in beaver ponds. Her efforts culminated in convincing Congress to declare Dolly Sods a wilderness area. It also highlights the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards program, which has helped educate visitors to the Sods and monitor the backcountry. The film should be available on YouTube and on the Conservancy's social media channels in the near future.

Our activities vary and span the spectrum of conservation work, and we need your help to continue, through donations of time and money. Thank you to all of you for your support.

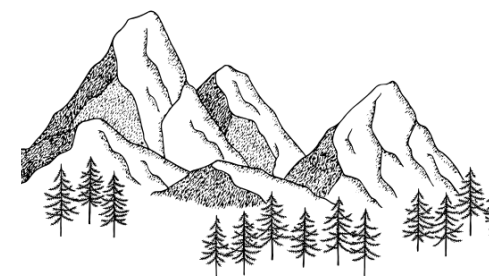
See you in the mountains,

**Marilyn Shoenfeld**

President

West Virginia Highlands

Conservancy



# West Virginia's Earth Day legacy

By C.A. Holmes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Environmentalism has taken many different forms over the years, from local grassroots activism to national non-profits and everything in between. But many of these efforts can be traced back to one event that breathed new life and structure into the movement. On Jan. 28, 1969, a Union Oil well blew out six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara, California. More than three million gallons of crude oil poured into the scenic California shoreline, killing thousands of birds and marine life. This tragedy evoked a fighting spirit in activists around the country, and one year later, on April 22, 1970, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and Activist Dennis Hayes, inspired by the energy of anti-war protests, organized a campus teach-in to discuss air and water pollution across the country. This was the inaugural Earth Day.

Earth Day was welcomed across the country, to the tune of 20 million Americans protesting in the streets and parks to demonstrate against the impacts befalling the earth from industrialization. News outlets across the nation took notice, and Earth Day was heard loud and clear. It unified hundreds of splintered groups fighting environmental injustices and even found support across party lines. Democrats and Republicans, union members and business owners, all supported a responsible approach to our roles as the caregivers of the third planet from the sun.

One of the most prominent supporters of Earth Day was West Vir-



Walter Reuther speaking to a large crowd in the 1960s.

ginia's own Walter Reuther. Reuther grew up in Wheeling but left home for Detroit at 19. He talked his way into a senior position at Ford, which he ultimately and controversially "quit" due to his ties to the Socialist Party of America. Reuther eventually became a prominent voice in the Democratic Party and was elected president of the United Auto Workers (UAW). In that capacity, he was a close ally of Rev. Martin Luther King, an envoy to Cuba for John F. Kennedy, and the largest funder of the inaugural Earth Day. Reuther's presence and support, both in press conferences and on Earth Day itself, lent the cause of the much-needed credibility it needed to succeed.

Reuther said in an address to the UAW in 1970, **"What good is a dollar an hour more in wages if your neighborhood is burning down? What good is another week's vacation if the lake you used to go to**

**is polluted and you can't swim in it, and the kids can't play in it?"**

Following the first Earth Day, Congress heeded the movement's call, and we entered into an unprecedented decade of environmental policy. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established under President Richard Nixon on Dec. 2, 1970, and paved the way for major improvements in regulatory practices. Throughout the next decade, Congress passed the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Toxic Substances Control Act, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. President Jimmy Carter followed suit in 1978 and continued the phaseout of lead in American gasoline and goods.

Fifty-six years later, as we approach Earth Day 2026 — here in Appalachia and especially in West Virginia—I feel a sense of betrayal

of the example set by great West Virginians like Walter Reuther. Our current leaders too often champion commerce over public health, rolling back regulations on above-ground mining storage tanks, inviting AI resource-draining data centers into our "Wild and Wonderful" state, and remaining silent as water quality across the state deteriorates, even when brown water from the southern coalfields was brought onto the floor of the House of Delegates.

Our governor, a notorious lobbyist and "white shoe" lawyer from New Jersey, filed a series of lawsuits against the EPA while serving as the state's Attorney General on behalf of various coal and energy interests, including *West Virginia v. EPA*. That case is notorious not only for the courts Republican majority setting the precedent now being used by the current administration to roll back the regulatory authority of the Clean Air Act established after the inaugural Earth Day, but also for the peaceful protest that occurred on Earth Day 2022. That day, on the steps of the Supreme Court, climate activist Wynn Bruce self-immolated himself as the court heard Morrissey's arguments.

West Virginia has an Earth Day legacy worthy of reclaiming. We have a responsibility as the custodians of this land, to honor it and protect it for future generations. We are Mountaineers, and we must fight to preserve the very mountains that give us our namesake. This Earth Day, show your pride for our environmental activist roots and show up for the earth. Be like Walter Reuther, not like Patrick Morrissey.

## Trailhead Stewards training and annual Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards picnic set for May 16

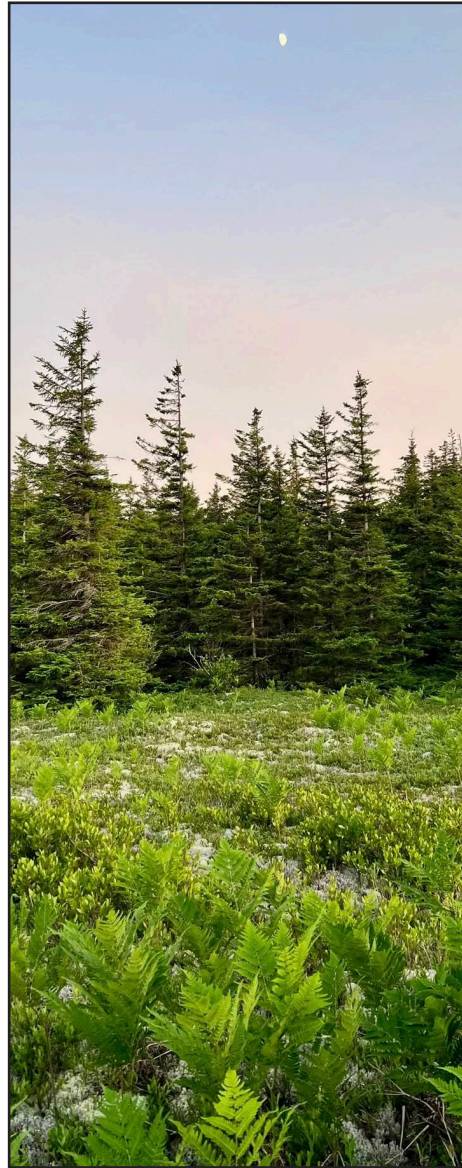
By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Monongahela National Forest will host a Trailhead Stewards training on Saturday, May 16, at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center, followed by the annual Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Picnic.

The training will introduce volunteers to the fundamentals of wilderness stewardship, including the history and unique features of Dolly Sods, the most pressing impacts on the area and effective techniques for engaging visitors at trailheads. Trailhead Stewards play a vital role in helping visitors prepare for a safe, enjoyable and low-impact experience by sharing Leave No Trace principles, offering route suggestions and answering questions.

After the training, new volunteers will have the opportunity to shadow an experienced Steward at a trailhead and gain hands-on experience. Participants will receive a Wilderness Stewards vest and educational materials and can schedule volunteer times that fit their availability.

No special skills are required, and there is no minimum time commitment. Volunteers of all experience levels — including those who



Scenic photo of Dolly Sods Wilderness Area at sunset. (Photo by Jill Watkins)

can only participate occasionally — are encouraged to get involved.

The annual stewards picnic will follow the training and offer a great opportunity to meet fellow volunteers and celebrate the ongoing work to protect Dolly Sods.

To sign up or learn more, visit [wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org) or contact the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards program at [dollysodsstewards@wvhighlands.org](mailto:dollysodsstewards@wvhighlands.org).

## West Virginia expands protections for native Brook Trout streams

By West Virginia Rivers Coalition

**Over 170 miles of streams newly recognized as “trout waters,” strengthening conservation for anglers and water quality.**

West Virginia has taken a significant step to protect headwater streams by designating over 170 miles of waterways as “trout waters” based on new survey results.

The new trout streams were documented by the WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) from data collected by the WV Division of Natural Resources (DNR) and non-profit conservation organizations. Results from this effort were presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Mid-Atlantic Aquatic Biologists in March.

This designation applies specifically to streams that support wild trout populations and specifically brook trout — West Virginia’s state fish and the only trout species native to Appalachia. Brook trout require cold, clean streams to survive, and their presence indicates high-quality streams of immense ecological and economic importance.

“This is an important success story,” said Dr. Nathaniel “Than” Hitt, Senior Scientist at the West Virginia Rivers Coalition. “We know that brook trout populations are in decline in many streams across Appalachia, and that makes it even more important to document and conserve brook trout streams



wherever we can.”

Initial data on trout distributions were compiled by Trout Unlimited, WV Rivers Coalition, and partner organizations, who collected eDNA and then conducted extensive electrofishing surveys and documented previously unassessed waters. These findings were subsequently confirmed by DNR before being incorporated into the DEP’s official list of trout waters. This effort highlights effective partnerships between governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local stakeholders.

“West Virginia has incredible wild and native trout resources, and this partnership has helped show just that,” said Dustin Wichterman, the Mid-Atlantic Coldwater Habitat Program Associate with Trout Unlimited. “Our anglers, watersheds and communities will benefit from this public-private partnership effort.”

Expanding the state’s trout waters also strengthens water quality standards to help safeguard drinking water sources, support recreation, encourage tourism, and preserve biodiversity across the region.

# More than the catch: Teaching the next angler

By Christa Clasgens, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Across West Virginia, folks are anxiously awaiting the weekend to arrive, checking out the stocking updates and weather reports. Even the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources is getting folks jazzed by sharing photos and videos of the mighty gold rush with our hallmark Palomino trout.

With river and weather conditions just about perfect everywhere across the state, it's easy to get overzealous and make plans to hit the water, and sometimes we forget to slow down and remember what brought us all here.

Most of us grew up fishing and were taught by our parents, siblings, or even our neighbors. Now take a moment to reflect and think of just how important those first moments on the water were to you. Some might even say those were the happiest memories you have of spending time on the water.

For this month of "Christa's Catch," I want to encourage everyone who enjoys fishing to make an effort to take someone with you who wants to learn. Whether your kids have shown an interest in joining you or your significant other has told you they want to learn, even the most unlikely anglers can find something they enjoy while being out on the water.

When we take moments like this to instruct and help each other grow in the angling space, a couple of things happen. One, you're creating memories and sharing your knowledge with someone who can use it for a lifetime. And two, you're subconsciously reviewing and re-



flecting on your own methods and processes to fine-tune them. The relationship between the student and the teacher is symbiotic in its own way.

The strength, resilience, and support of the angling community are built on the principles of sharing knowledge, celebrating great moments on the water, and lending a hand so your fishing buddy doesn't go home without catching at least one fish.

The moments we share with one another on the water are investments that pay lifetime dividends in happiness and memories. Go forth and build those memories today. As always, stay safe on the water, practice catch-and-release and tight lines!

**Do you like what you're reading? Join us next month for another installment of Christa's Catch!**



# Save the Date for WVHC's 2026 Fall Review: "From Ridges to Rivers: Safeguarding What Sustains Us"

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

This fall, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy invites conservationists, advocates and community members from across the region to gather in the highlands for a weekend of learning, reflection and connection.

Mark your calendars for **Oct. 23–25**, when WVHC's annual Fall Review returns—this time at Canaan Valley Resort in Davis, West Virginia—under the theme **"From Ridges to Rivers: Safeguarding What Sustains Us."**

From the forested ridgelines that define Appalachia's skyline to the streams and rivers that sustain our communities and wildlife, the landscapes we cherish are deeply interconnected. The 2026 Fall Re-



The WVHC's last Fall Review at Canaan Valley was in 2024. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

view will explore how we protect these vital systems—and the people who depend on them—in the face of growing environmental pressures.

Set against the sweeping views of Canaan Valley, the weekend will

bring together environmental leaders, scientists, advocates, and concerned citizens to share ideas, build partnerships, and strengthen the movement to protect West Virginia's lands and waters.

As always, our Fall Review will offer opportunities to dig into the issues shaping our region's future while also enjoying the outdoors and the company of fellow conservationists. Whether you're a long-time supporter or new to WVHC's work, this gathering is a chance to recharge, reconnect, and recommit to the work ahead.

We're currently developing the weekend's program and will share more details—including speakers, sessions, and activities—in the coming months.

For now, save the date and plan to join us in beautiful Canaan Valley this October for a weekend dedicated to protecting the ridges, rivers and communities that sustain us all.

Registration information will be announced soon.

## 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**  
 You may also join online at [www.wvhighlands.org](http://www.wvhighlands.org)

# Recap of the 2026 Appalachian Studies Association Conference

By Dave Cooper, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Member

On the weekend of March 20–21, I attended the 49th annual Appalachian Studies Association Conference held at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. This conference brings together activists, writers, students, visionaries, academic leaders, artists, poets, historians and musicians to discuss and celebrate the unique culture and history of Appalachia.

The theme for the 2026 conference was “Power of a Place, Power of Its People,” and this year’s conference chair was Dr. Cicero M. Fain, assistant research director and outreach specialist for the Appalachian Freedom Heritage Initiative, a nine-county, three-state initiative to locate and document Underground Railroad sites in the tri-state region of Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia.

The conference offered about 250 sessions over two days, and I attended nine. All were interesting



An auditorium full of attendees at the 2026 Appalachian Studies Association Conference held at Marshall University. (Photo provided by Appalachian Studies Association)

and educational. I often had a difficult time choosing which session to attend, as there were too many good ones. Each time slot offered

about 25 different sessions. I also led a talk on the music of the anti-mountaintop removal movement, in which I played clips of the songs

that I think were most important to the movement.

Some of the conference highlights:

Keynote speaker Dr. Bill Turner, who grew up in Lynch, Kentucky (Harlan County), and became a noted educator and author of “Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns,” “brought down the house” with his spirited talk, “Been to the Mountaintop.”

WMMT and Appalshop led several sessions on the difficulties they have had restoring their historic collection of film and video that was lost in the 2022 flood. A young filmmaker, Nik Lee, presented an endearing short film entitled “Strings” about reclaiming her family’s precious home movie footage from the muck.

The Mine Wars Museum in Matewan, West Virginia, has been hard at work building a museum dedicated to the history of the min-

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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 [christa.clasgens@wvhighlands.org](mailto:christa.clasgens@wvhighlands.org)

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## Recap of the 2026 Appalachian Studies Association Conference

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ers' rebellion and the 1921 march to Blair Mountain — the largest labor uprising in American history. I'm looking forward to visiting this museum in April.

“Hellbenders as Emissaries of Appalachia,” a talk by Tierra Curry of the Center for Biological Diversity. Curry is a Knott County, Kentucky, native.

“In Honor of Gurney Norman,” a session devoted to readings by the late Kentucky poet laureate.

“Our Land, Our Home: Engagement and Strategy for Legislative Action in Appalachia,” led by members of the Alliance for Appalachia.

“Folk Songs from the West Virginia Coalfields,” convened by Chris Haddox of West Virginia University.

“Resource Extraction and Resistance: Teaching on the Adverse Health Impacts of AI Data Centers in Appalachia and How Communities Fight Back,” presented by Anna Mullany of Appalachian State University.

The conference was a terrific networking event, and I got to meet

and talk with so many interesting people. Several times I just sat down next to someone I didn't know between sessions and had a fascinating conversation. There were lots of professors but also many young people — students are a vital part of this conference. There were musicians, poets, filmmakers, activists and old-timers who shared Appalachian traditions.

There was an Appalachian film festival, but I was not able to attend it. The Jack Spadaro Documentary Film Award was given to “A Beast Touch the Mountain,” directed by James Mottern (Bent Mountain Productions, 2025), which is the story of a band of Appalachian women who fight to protect their land and way of life against a greedy and corrupt natural gas pipeline.

The conference also offered a visit to the site of the tragic 1970 plane crash that killed the entire Marshall University football team, coaches and crew members. Other tour options included visits to the Mothman Museum in Point Pleasant, West Virginia; the Underground Railroad in the tri-state; the Blenko Glass Factory; and the Huntington Museum of Art.

The ASA Conference moves to different sites every year (usually university campuses). The location for next year's conference had not been determined at press time. But I can highly recommend this conference to any West Virginia Highlands Conservancy member.

## Hit the trails with our Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the West Virginia Highlands

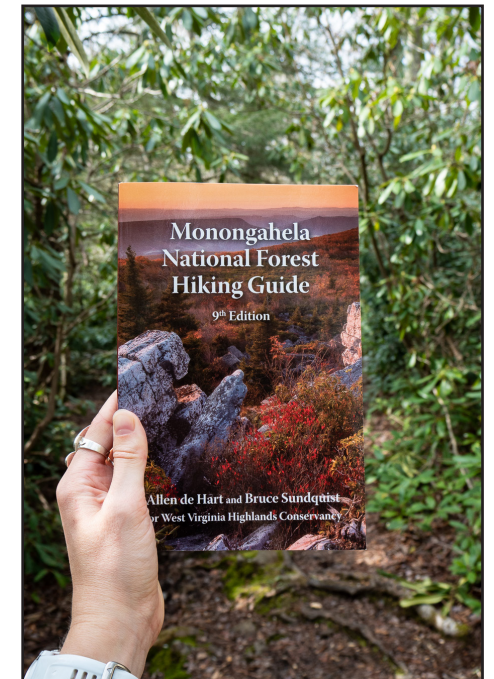
Conservancy, the new edition of the treasured guide to every trail in the Monongahela National Forest features brand-new topographic maps and Kent Mason's gorgeous photos, all in color.

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

- Newly designated wilderness areas
- New trails near campgrounds and sites of special significance
- A new complex of interconnected trails on Cheat Mountain
- Rerouted and discontinued trails
- Ratings for difficulty, scenery, access to water, and much else

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

The Monongahela National Forest has long been known as a ‘Special Place.’ The hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing opportunities it provides are among



the best in the eastern U.S. New wilderness and backcountry trails have been added to the outstanding areas we have appreciated for decades — Otter Creek Wilderness, Dolly Sods Wilderness, Flatrock Plains, Roaring Plains, Blackwater Canyon, Spruce Knob, North Fork Mountain, Shaver's Mountain, Laurel Fork Wilderness, Cranberry Wilderness -- and there are lesser-known gems to be found in between.

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

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