WVHC Files Major Citizen Complaints

by Cindy Bink, Mining Chair

Complaints Focus on Water Issues

Acting on behalf of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC) and the National Wildlife Federation, attorneys Tom Ollowey and Walt Morris filed several citizen complaints with the Federal Office of Surface Mining (OSM) on January 31, 1993.

The complaints continue to advance WVHC’s efforts to correct deficiencies in the West Virginia Surface Mine Regulatory Program thereby effecting changes that will improve the quality of life and the environment in West Virginia.

The main focus of these recent complaints is water and the enforcement of those provisions of the Federal Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) and the Clean Water Act (CWA) that deal with water issues.

Four of the complaints address major programmatic issues and contain lists of several individual permits that substantiate the claims made in the complaint. They address 1) WV’s failure to adjust bonds or to increase the bond pool (Special Reclamation Fund) to cover long-term treatment costs for acid mine drainage (AMD) at filled mine sites and at sites currently under permit where the permits are now treating AMD; 2) WV’s failure to treat AMD at bond forfeited sites (a requirement recognized by the Supreme Court of WV in granting a writ of mandamus in July 1994 in response to the Scott/McCliney petition for WVHC and others); 3) WV’s failure to permit-block companies with outstanding water violations; and 4) WV’s failure to meet other hydrologic provisions of SMCRA and CWA, e.g., requiring companies to have an NPDSS per-

The Electronic VOICE

WNPB, Morgantown Public TV, with the help of US Rep. Allen Micheline and the WV Highlands Conservancy, has created an electronic bulletin board, mail and information service for West Virginia groups and citizens. Besides the VOICE there are a lot of other interesting goodies there. In the Government section (called conference) there is a listing of all Senators, Representatives, State Senators and Delegates and their addresses, phones, and committee assignments. All the counties in Monongah’s district have their own place to post messages about news and area events. Connection to the Internet is promised soon!!

The mail service is excellent. Both Little and Richard Dietz sent me their article for this month’s VOICE to me via electronic mail. You can post your own musings for all to read in one of the many conferences on Forestry, Mining, Public Lands, Biodiversity, etc. Former WVHC president Bob Hurrell is hosting a conference on gardening, which seems to be drawing the most activity. There are other conferences on computers, music, area events, birding, aviation, social issues... Everyday there’s something new being added.

Today I saw info about all the colleges and tech centers in WV. The WV Geologic Survey has information on its services and publications. If you have a computer with a modem you can join in on the fun (and send me articles). It’s easy to do, just have your computer call 1-800-375-4064. If you are in the Morgantown area use 293-8663. Ports of Ohio and Pennsylvania can also use the 800 number. After you are connected hit return twice and read the directions. There are (see page 5)
Commonsense

When it comes to disputes over whether some new project will be built, there is one overriding rule: The day the bulldozers show up the fight is over. So long as the project is just a gleam in the eye of some developer, the opponents have a chance. Once there is actual construction, the fight is effectively over. No matter how bad an idea it was to begin with, once something actually exists on the ground it becomes nearly impossible to stop. State and federal agencies and even the courts will find a way to make sure that it continues to exist.

There are, of course, rare exceptions to this rule. The Friends of the Little Kanawha managed to stop mining in their watershed after the actual on the ground construction had begun. The citizens who are fighting the Waste Technologies Industries hazardous waste incinerator still hope to stop even though construction is complete.

Still, the rule operates. So long as an idea is just that—an idea—then it can be changed. Once it becomes a physical reality, for all practical purposes it cannot.

It is because of this rule that the United States Environmental Protection Agency's action concerning dioxin levels in the Ohio River is so disappointing.

EPA had originally taken the position that state regulators had to determine the current dioxin levels in the Ohio River before they could issue a permit to the pulp mill proposed for Mascot County. This was an entirely sensible position. Determining the existing condition of a stream is a routine part of deciding whether to issue a permit that would allow a discharge into that stream.

In early February, 1995, the EPA reversed itself, announcing that it would not insist that West Virginia regulators refrain from permitting the mill until after they determined the current levels of dioxin in the Ohio River. It said, in effect, that West Virginia could go ahead and issue a permit while ignoring the current dioxin levels.

In what it called a "landmark commonsense approach", the EPA simultaneously announced that there would be a two year study of dioxin levels in the Ohio River watershed.

What it really announced, however, was that on the greatest environmental question in West Virginia of the 1990's, the United States Environmental Protection Agency intends to do nothing. Two years is plenty of time for the State of West Virginia to blunder ahead in its ignorance, issue the permit, and allow construction to begin. If that happens, it doesn't matter what the study says. The mill will no longer be an abstraction. It will be a real facility with real people working at real jobs. If this happens then there is no government official on the planet (or not in West Virginia or Washington, anyway) who would shut it down. They will find a way to let it continue.

This would not, of course, necessarily be a bad idea. The Governor may be right; maybe the pulp mill is what it takes to bring West Virginia to the promised land. I personally don't think he is but one never knows. Maybe a thorough and honest study would reveal that, all current indications to the contrary, there really is no dioxin already in the river. Maybe the dioxin from the pulp mill won't hurt anybody.

What is clearly a bad idea, however, is EPA's position in this matter. Instead of helping West Virginia make a wise decision, it has announced that it will do nothing. It has taken refuge in a plan to study the problem for two years. By that time, the decisions on the pulp mill will have been made.

West Virginia finds itself in a crisis. It is a crisis in the old, traditional sense of the word: a turning point, a moment of decision. As we reach that moment of decision, the United States Environmental Protection Agency has decided to do nothing. It has decided upon its "landmark commonsense approach" of studying the issue until it is too late for effective action. This approach may be "commonsense" if the goal is avoiding controversy. As far as helping West Virginia with its current crisis, it is useless.
The Highlands Voice, March 1995 - Page 3

Earth Day at the Capitol

The government-sponsored Earth Day will be held from May 13 to 15 at 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. in the Statennial Office of Senate and House Committees, and in the Capitol Office of the Speaker of the House.

The event will feature a variety of speakers and events, including a morning keynote address by Senator Frank R. Capito, followed by a panel discussion on environmental issues.

In the afternoon, there will be a film screening and a concert featuring local musicians. The event will conclude with a closing ceremony featuring a speech by Governor Jim Justice.

For more information, please contact the Office of the Speaker of the House at 304-974-3600.
Canaan
Mon Power to log holdings in Canaan Valley

By Rick Stockheimer
February
The nation's

Canaan Valley

National Wildlife Refuge, the country's 500th wildlife refuge was a reality. Conservation groups celebrated. Wildland owners were pleased. Monongahela Power Co., the largest landowner within the proposed boundaries of the new Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, plans to authorize logging on its Canaan Valley holdings starting this spring.

The power company, which owns more than of its acres, has been authorized for inclusion in the refuge, is currently negotiating a contract for the Canaan Valley timber sale, accor-

ding to Mon Power spokeswoman Mary Lynn Sacco. Sacco said the sale involves the valuable hardwood species of cherry, maple, yellow poplar and ash. But the amount of acreage and board feet involved in the cut, and the type of harvesting method to be used, are proprietary information, she said, and are not being announced.

Last summer, the US Fish and Wildlife Service purchased a parcel of land for the refuge - an acre tract along the southern edge of the preserve. So far, Congress has authorized $3.2 million for further land acquisitions for the nation's 500th federal wildlife refuge, and Fish and Wildlife real estate officers are negoti-

ing for new additions.

The Mon Power property, located at the north end of the valley, is rated at the top of three categories in a Fish and Wildlife Service priority scale for prospective land purchases for the new refuge. The federal agency wants the power company to sell logging permits at market value.

"So far, we have no agreements with anyone to buy any of the property," said the editor of The Highlands Voice, March 1995 - Page 4

Canaan Valley Spring. Mon Power considers many, of the cut to be "pro-

tective information". U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel in Elkans and the impact on the land "would depend on the type and intensity of harvesting". Unconfirmed word is that the timber sale may be 500,000 board feet of all but the smallest diameter cherry, maple, ash, and poplar trees.

Although specifics of the cut are not yet known, some things are worth considering. "If anyone would imagine a wildlife refuge without the addition of this forest, they'd be sorely mistaken," said Mon Power's intention to begin logging its extensive land holdings in Canaan Valley. Putting the Public

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The last poll was the Fall 1994 Kentucky Survey on Forest Management and Biodiversity. Questions on this survey were "illegal to cut, not for the U.S. Department of Forestry and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife. The survey results were based on random samples from all parts of the state. Here's question 56 "In your opinion, should there be more logging on public lands in Kentucky?" The overall response was only 11.3% support logging, while 74.2% opposed logging. Although opposition was high, 67% of those polled in the Eastern part of Kentucky, wherein lies the Daniel Boone National Forest, opposed logging in the National Forest. The Kentucky Poll found that most citizens favored government regulation of timbering on private lands to protect streams and wet-

lands, endangered and threatened spe-
cies and "to preserve the beauty of the forest".

One question asked "Are you fa-
miliar with the terms biological diversity or biodiversity?" Only 20% had heard of biodiversity before, and of that, only 34% said that they were not. I believe this shows how badly we need to get the word out. The poll also showed that "Biodi-
v</p>
The Highlands Voice, March 1995 - Page 5

By Bill Rogget

Surveys show the public does not want cutting in National Forests

The Governor has directed the WV Division of Forestry to revise its Management Plans for State Forests. He wants to make sure they are managed for the benefit of all West Virginians. The question has become how can we get the public involved in the management of our state forests. The federal government has a process that does get lots of public involvement. Thousands of comments were received and reviewed when the Monongahela National Forest Plan was created back in '86. But many folks are still unhappy with the amount of timber and road building occurring.

Monongahela Forest News

Marlinton Ranger District
PO Box 210
Marlinton, WV 26745
304-779-4334
Fax 779 6820
Burke Mountain OA (45.116)
Buckley Mountain lies just north of Watoga State Park and south of the Allegheny Front. OA (90, MONO) April 1993) to the west in the Greenbrier River. To the east runs Route 21. This is the area where the primary management emphasis is on providing remote habitat for wildlife species that are sensitive to human disturbance, specifically black bear and turkey. The plan further states that this prescription focuses on optimizing hard mast production and maintaining age classes over time.

What this means is clearcut. In order to regenerate Oak (main) clearcutting is usually necessary. Also notice the "balance of age classes." This does not mean on one aged forest. It means continual c. "cutting to create even aged stands throughout the forest. Where 10% of the stands are in the 0-15 year old class, 10% in the 16-30 age class, etc.

This prescription has more land under its" tare than any other in the Monongahela. Its seems ironic that even though the Monongahela clearcutting issue was the leading factor in the establishment of the National Forest Management Act, clearcutting is still the main source of timber in the Mon.

And here's the proposed projects. One stage clearcut - 257 acres Two stage clearcut - 109 acres Cut rotate new commercial tracts on above tracts Smoke barren at 191 acre Plant 217 acres to oak seedlings Only 42 more acres Create 16 wildlife openings Create 3 non forest roads Construct 5 miles of road

Elk Mountain Timber Sale
Cynthia Schiffer, the ranger for the Marlinton District has announced that the Environmental Assessment for the Elk Mountain Timber Sale project will soon be available for public review. Call and ask up and ask for a copy (they are usually 200 pages long). Ask the acceptance date on the project currently. Hal Burke.

The FS calls this area the Cleverl­lick Mountain Project Area. It is located north of Marlinton, bordered by US highway 219 and the Highland Scenic Highway and contains part of Elk and Cleverlick Mountain. The federal lands are a bit scattered, but National Forest lands total 4,883 acres in this OA.

Cynthia has chosen the second most disruptive of the 4 alternatives considered. It's called the Viginia Point action. The proposed action (not the one she chooses) is the most intrusive. This OA is classified 6.1, which means conducting activities that do not disturb native wildlife and to emphasize non-motorized, semi-primitive recreation. The ranger proposes to clearcut 75 acres, two age cut 92 acres and then 86 acres, build 2.13 miles of road and cost $219,180. No figures were listed for the return to treasury.

Potomac Ranger District
HC59 Box 240
Petersburg, WV 26847
304 257 4488
Fax 304 257 2482
Osceola OA

The Potomac Ranger District is in the beginning stages of conducting an environmental analysis of several proposed projects near Spencer-Baby Lake. All the creeks that drain this area flow into Gandy Creek. The main creeks are Big Run, Greeners Branch and Narrow Ridge Run. The projects are located within 3070 acres of National Forest land. These acres are part of the Osceola OA (53,009 - which means district 5 (Potomac), prescription 3.0 - how the FS plans to mediate the area, 99 - the area number).

The 3.0 prescription is detailed in the Forest Plan. The desired future condition for this area (according to the plan) is production of large, high quality forest stands, including a diversity of forest views, habitats for wildlife tolerant of disturbance, and a primarily motorized recreation environment.

Nancy Feneks, the ranger for this district, has proposed the following actions: Clearcut of various types - 92 acres; individual tree selection 120 acres; thinning/354 acres. Although its called a thinning, most of the thinned trees will be marketed. 4.4 miles of road will be constructed to facilitate the removal of timber in the short and long term. Other temporary roads may be built. Mountain bike and hiking trails will be 1-1/4. The Spruce Lake lower parking lot will double in size.

A patch of the land in this area has great potential for Flying Squirrel Habitat, but the long road and cutting at 4000' elevation will have negative impacts on this habitat.

Greenbrier Ranger District
PO Box 67
Barton, WV 24920
456-3333
Fax 456-3441

Jim Thomas, ranger for this district is calling for comments on the Frank Mountain OA. Of course all the project decisions have been made, but maybe they'll move the timber sale boundaries a few feet if you really make a stink. Here's the proposed action — Clearcutting - 39 acres cable harvest 134 acres. Commercial thinning - 142 acres Road construction 7/4 miles!!!

Herbsidence - hundreds of acres, etc.
Frank Mountain OA lies on the Virginia border, east of Bartow and North of Thornwood. It contains 6300 acres of federal land. Jim also proposes to designate 343 acres as mature habitat. This is a small patch for the whole growth and size of Frank Mountain.

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The Electric Voice

(From page 1) several help conferences available. If you have a Mac or IBM clone running windows 3.1, you can use a special program that makes the computer run in 40 (approx.) times easier to read the bulletin board. The software is available for free downloading, just follow directions on your screen. Tami Stin­ naker and Mike Breiding are the Op­ erators of this system. You can send questions to them if you really can't figure it out yourself. I've felt foolish a couple of times bothering them only to be told, check something out on the help file. Mike and Tami are working

by Frank McFiekey

the results were nearly identical. The soil has the properties of a good southern half of the Hoosier National Forest.

The survey was done by the US Forest Service, entitled "Forest Service Values Poll Quantifies Results and Analysis." It is Appendix D of "Architecture for Change: Inter­ im Report of the Forest Service Rein­ vestment Team." June 15, 1994. The survey was in the form of a statement with the respondent giving a chance to say on any of 1 to 7 whether they strongly disagreed to strongly agreed with the statement. Neutral responses were assigned number 4. The first statement was "All Forest Service and National Forests and Grasslands Should be Made Available to Produce Consumer Goods." Response — (see page 4)
Perception, Vision and Motivation

What Does The Environmental Movement Envision For the Future of West Virginia?

by Richard diPietro
February 22, 1995

INTRODUCTION

I gladly consider myself an environmentalist. I also believe deeply in democracy and I care about the future of our state, nation, and world. Because of that, I want to discuss the future of the environmental movement in West Virginia, which is to say the future of West Virginia, because they are inextricably bound up.

Please look at the illustration from the Coal Bell which accompanies this column. And then let me start with quotes from people with a rather different agenda from ours, people I will refer to in this column as exploiters.

"The 'no-build' opponents of Corridor H are mostly out of state 'preserving the world only for me' groups who would deny a job and way of life to West Virginia's less fortunate people." - Sam Bousso (engineer and promoter of Coopers Rock Tramway)

"Meyers Coal: working to create more good jobs in West Virginia."

Prepares paid commercial on West Virginia Public Radio.

"...enviro extremists are out to eliminate jobs in West Virginia. - K. O. Damron, WV Coal Bell, 11/94"

These quotes illustrate the approach taken by the exploiters to control debate in West Virginia by defining us and themselves. None of the quotes expresses the truth, but that doesn't matter. K. O. Damron and his ilk: working to create certain perceptions in West Virginia.

I don't think any environmentalist has ever had as a goal the elimination of a single job. We have had the goal of aiding in the inevitable transition from the exploiter economy, which can't go on forever, to the sustainable economy, which can. We recognize that the economy changes all the time. Jobs boom and jobs bust. And Meyers Coal is not "working to create more good jobs."

In fact, Meyers, like any sensible corporation, tries to accomplish its profit goals with the smallest possible workforce. If Meyers Coal could get all the profit it expects in West Virginia without employing a single person, it most certainly would.

The political pendulum is in one of its swings, this time, according to the exploiters, away from environmental protection. I don't believe that the fabled 'American people' will permit very much weakening of environmental protection. This pendulum, if it swings much at all on that subject, will swing back to environmental protection as soon as the next Hurricane Andrew, drought, ozone study or carbon study hits. But the current perceived general swing toward the exploiters' perspective at both the state and national levels emboldens them to crank up the level of rhetoric against us.

They always wish to define us. We can't let that happen. So I think right now is a good time to reflect on where the environmental movement finds itself in West Virginia and where it should head in the future. That will help us get more prepared when we ride the next pendulum swing in our direction.

INTERRUPTED NEGATIVITY

One of the criticsimns levied at us in the environmental community is that we are always against everything. No matter what gets proposed, we're against it. Whether it be legislation, public works, or private enterprise, we're against it. We're against things just for the sake of being against. We wouldn't know how to be for something.

In reality, our critics call us negative for not supporting what they initiate. I'll be very surprised if the coal, chemical, or garbage industries ever introduce significant legislation or make plans for facilities which the environmental community cannot successfully support. Why? Because the vision that those industries have for the future of West Virginia is a vision most of us can't feel comfortable with.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

It comes down to perception. We must first decide if a given proposal represents a positive or negative for us. Obviously, a major new mountaintop removal job destroying thousands of acres of hardwoods, or a massive new water-polluting underground mine seem positive to K. O. Damron. They don't to me.

It comes down to vision. Remember when Arch Moore plagued us most recently as governor? His vision had West Virginia covered with new state-financed power plants, its horizon fractured with new powerlines (using the right-of-way of I-79, for instance), suffering unrestricted coal mining, inviting private-for-profit prisons, reinstating the death penalty, and promoting gambling. This adds up to a negative vision for me.

SO WHAT IS OUR VISION?

We're not comfortable with their vision. So what is ours? I don't profess to know the answer to this question. But I think we have to address Millwood and Huntington in the Ohio River after he discusses the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Do Not Eat" fish advisory, of course. Perhaps he will read and otherwise learn more about the state's industrial and labor history. And this state's political history is fascinating when viewed in the context of industrial development.

Then, in another couple years or so, perhaps Meyers' conversion to a West Virginia business will be more complete. He can then tell us more about our need to be educated about the "soundness of the business environment." Business and industry have had their way in West Virginia for over a century. How much more of their "education" can we stand?

Meyers' efforts to "balance costs and benefits" on the continuing basis of externalizing the costs of manufacture but is one more sentence in the many chapters of jobs and economic blackmail by corporate profiteers and their apologists.

With due respect to Mr. Meyers, the masters from outside who would educate West Virginians on the "soundness of the business environment" could stand some education themselves. Maybe we can call him up sometime to discuss how those "developed" counties' citizens are among the poorest in the state.

And perhaps he'll enjoy catching and eating some of the various varieties of fish between Morgantown and Huntington in the Ohio River after he discusses the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's "Do Not Eat" fish advisory, of course. Perhaps he will read and otherwise learn more about the state's industrial and labor history. And this state's political history is fascinating when viewed in the context of industrial development.

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Meyers' efforts to "balance costs and benefits" on the continuing basis of externalizing the costs of manufacture but is one more sentence in the many chapters of jobs and economic blackmail by corporate profiteers and their apologists.

With due respect to Mr. Meyers, the masters from outside who would educate West Virginians on the "soundness of the business environment" could stand some education themselves. Maybe we can call him up sometime to discuss how those "developed" counties' citizens are among the poorest in the state.

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by Frank Young

Recently Garry Meyers, President and CEO of Republic Alumimium Corporation (RAC), contributed a column about West Virginia’s image to the West Virginia Roundtable Discussion’s Winter of ’95 edition. For the past two years of so I have been encouraged by Garry Meyers’ image of openness and fairness as the CEO of Jackson County’s largest industry.

As a member of the business community, I have been happy that Meyers endeavored to help improve RAC’s own image in the business community.

This is no small feat when one remembers how hard some of his predecessors worked to make the image of Jackson County and the business and labor community one of shame and embarrassment.

Soon after his arrival in Jackson County two years ago, Meyers admitted that RAC had several responsibilities to the community. I believe that he has worked diligently on some of those.

However, Meyers’ column shows a narrow mindset. He seems to try to reduce virtually all aspects of life to dollars and cents. For example, he says that West Virginia has a reputation for positions on environmental matters that “reject a balance of costs and benefits.”

This implies that environmental costs and benefits can somehow be measured and assigned values and weighed the same as other aspects of business life. I do not believe this is possible.

How does one measure quality of life, or the lack thereof? Meyers also seems to equate quality of life with a standard of living. But these two concepts represent entirely different values.

In measuring environmental values, how does one assign a dollar amount or any other measurement to clean water, to air quality, or to a place where free of disease or injury causing conditions? How can we measure the loss of a human life due to cancer or other disease caused by mankind’s activities? How can we assign a measurable “value” to water or air spoiled by our industrial activities.

We can’t.

But the costs of living with the environment in a fouled condition just cannot be measured in absolute terms that permit Mr. Meyers and others to “balance” costs and benefits.

So what do we do? We can continue to say that pollution is bad and that economic development is good. Various forces representing each side sometimes advocate for unlimited development or absolute environmental purity.

That is one that has been rehashed over and over again in the pages of the VOICE.

who say that we must strike a “balance” between the two positions are misguided, though perhaps sometimes sincere.

A better process would include placing the full costs of producing various products into their market price, hiking into full account all the environmental costs of producing the product. The market price, then, should reflect the total costs of the product, including environmental consequences of production and/or the costs of preventing those consequences.

But this is not how the market works. Now, for the most part, the environmental costs of producing a product are paid by systems outside the marketing of the product. Taxpayers pay for environmental regulation and for cleaning of toxic industrial sites. Our health insurance systems pay for some of the costs of cancer, nerve disorders and the many other diseases and disorders caused by environmental abuse. Health disorders caused by an unsafe workplace environment are paid for by all of society in the form of inefficient labor, lost wages for workers’ families and government subsidies to disabled workers and their families.

We pay with tears for the death of loved ones due to health effects of worse environmental practices. Can the tears be reduced to something measurable so that Mr. Meyers and others can “balance” costs and benefits?

And the quality of life Mr. Meyers says he found in West Virginia is lowered for all of society when the environment is sacrificed. How do we measure and “balance” this?

The total environmental welfare costs to society for pollution and destruction of the human environment is never incorporated, to any significant degree, into the market price of the products industry produces.

In America, this is because profit motivated interests lobby politicians for non-enforcement of existing environmental regulations. They lobby Congress and state legislatures for lower or no environmental standards. And they slop tens of millions of dollars into politicians’ campaign coffers for office to “buy” the lower standards and lax enforcement.

All this is done in the name of being “competitive” and maintaining a “balance of costs and benefits”, as Meyers says. But this (see page 6)
Bio Diversity

by Beth Little

To define "biodiversity," biodiversity is the sum of all life. But to describe what it means, to explain why it's important, why it's a matter of concern to conservationists and scientists, is another matter. Edward O. Wilson's "The Diversity of Life" is probably the best reference, and it's a fascinating read for those who want an in-depth explanation. I'm going to attempt a short explanation by hitting the highlights and giving a few examples. Much of what follows closely paraphrases Wilson.

First of all, to talk about biodiversity, you have to talk about ecosystems. "Ecosystem" is a word that describes a particular environment and all the life within it, along with the processes and interactions that sustain it. An ecosystem can be as small as a mud puddle; or, of course, the entire planet. By life is meant all the plants, animals, insects and microorganisms. When we get to the processes and interactions that it gets complicated; but this is the heart of understanding biodiversity, because life is dependent on the processes and interactions among life forms and with the environment. In fact, many scientists include this complexity of interdependence as part of the definition of biodiversity.

The most obvious interaction is the food chain. Animals eat plants or other animals to survive. But the life within the ecosystem is in constant flux, a 24-hour cycle of birth, maturity, and death. Plants depend on carbon dioxide in the air, which animals breathe out. And nutrients in the soil from decaying organisms. And microorganisms, such as bacteria and fungi play vital role in transforming nutrients from one form to another that can be used by the next player in the chain. For instance, mushroom spores are necessary for converting nutrients in the soil to a form that tree roots can absorb, to that extent that tree farmers often inoculate their soil with mushrooms from a natural forest in order to grow better.

But the food chain is just one interaction. Life forms also depend on each other for things such as fertilization. The honeybee's role in pollination is the most common example. The pocketbook, which is another type of interaction. It makes an outgrowth on its mantle that mimicks a tiny fish, complete with eyespots and fuzzy tail. This tissue pulses rhythmically so that the "fish" looks as if it is actually swimming. When a real fish rushes in to gulp the lure, the muscler releases a burst of mucous, luring the fish into the lips. After hitchhiking awhile, they drop off and begin life on the bottom. In this way, an animal that never moves can keep replenishing its population upstream against the current. (See the March 1995 issue of "National Geographic").

If these interactions between species are affected, it has consequences on the entire ecosystem. If, for instance, all the pollinating insects are killed in an effort to stop a "bad" insect (such as the gypsy moth), some trees and flowers will not be able to produce seed. This would affect the animals that depend on those fruits and nuts (seeds) for food. An example that illustrates the importance of pollination; some WV beekeepers make more money hauling their bee's to Florida to pollinate the orange groves, than they do from the honey.

In addition to the interactions between life forms, biodiversity is dependent on environmental conditions such as temperature, amount of moisture and pH balance. The reason that most of the forest wildlife, such as spring beauty, hepatica and dogbane's branches, blooms in the early spring is because that is when the most sunlight warms the forest floor. The days have gotten longer, and the leaves haven't come out yet. But these wildflowers require the cool moist soil of the forest during the heart of the summer. A drastic change in environmental factors can alter the biodiversity of an ecosystem, causing nature to stop and start or even complete destruction. The lack of fish in many streams because of high acidity is an example. Temperature can be affected by major changes, such as global warming, or by small local changes, such as cutting trees and letting the sunlight in to the soil, which also affects soil moisture. On a small scale, this can increase biodiversity, but too much can benefit one or a few species at the expense of others and create an imbalance. Where large areas have been completely deforested, such as some parts of Africa, the amount of moisture in the soil and rainfall patterns have been so altered that deserts have been created where forests used to be.

Just plain size affects biodiversity. The larger the ecosystem the greater the biodiversity. The ratio that is consistent around the world, is that an area ten times as large another will have twice as many species. So a one thousand acre area will have twice as many species as an one hundred acre area of the same type of ecosystem. Conversely, if you reduce a thousand acre area is reduced to a hundred acres, half the species can be expected to disappear. One reason for this is that small ecosystems cannot support the larger predators, which need lots of space - for a source of adequate food, but also for a sufficient gene pool of breeding pairs. Without a sufficient gene pool, there is no natural selection against genetic defects. Florida panthers may be doomed because they are inbred that all the young males now carry a genetic defect. The presence of large predators is a measure of the health of an ecosystem, because when biodiversity declines, they are the first to go.

Around the world species are disappearing at an accelerated rate through human action, primarily habitat destruction but also pollution and the introduction of exotic species. At current rates a fifth or more of the species of plants and animals will vanish or be doomed to early extinction by the year 2020 unless better efforts are made to save them. In the world as a whole, extinction rates are already hundreds or thousands of times higher than before the coming of man, except for what occurred during the major catastrophes.

There were five of them, the most recent was 65 million years ago at the end of the Cretaceous period, when the dinosaurs disappeared. The loss of species was probably about 50 percent in each spasm, except for the Permian, 245 million years ago, which saw a staggering loss of 96 percent. The reasons for the mass extinctions are subject to fascinating scientific speculation, but more pertinent to our concern is the fact that it took tens of millions of years for life to recover to the original level of diversity. It took five million years just for a strong start. These figures should give pause to anyone who believes that what Homo sapiens destroys, Nature will ream. Maybe so, but "within any length of time that has meaning for contemporary humanity. Meanwhile, humanity has initiated the sixth great extinction