

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The Highlands Voice

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Dam on Cheat River on its Way Out

By John McFerrin

There is a move afoot to remove the dam on the Cheat River which historically created the pool necessary for the operation of the Albright Power Station. The dam was never designed for flood control and never served that purpose. Since the power station has long since closed, the dam no longer serves a purpose and can be removed.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service describes the project this way:

The Albright Power Station Dam is a 12-foot low head dam built in 1952 on the Cheat River to feed an adjacent power plant. The plant was permanently closed in 2012 with no viable options for future reopening. The dam acts as a barrier

to both aquatic species and river recreationalists, posing a significant safety hazard. Eastern Hellbender are in the vicinity, and previously extirpated walleye as well as multiple mussel species could return to the river segment once the dam is removed and water quality improved. Additionally, two brook trout streams directly upstream and downstream of the Albright Power Station Dam will be functionally reconnected after dam removal, making currently separated populations more resilient to disturbance and climate change.

The effort to remove of the dam has been led by the Friends of the Cheat. It is part of its decades long effort to transform the

(More on p. 3)

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Thoughts from our President

By Larry Thomas

Summer has arrived and It has been fantastic watching Mother Nature accomplishing her annual transformation of our Highlands during the last couple months. Trees have leafed out in their different shades of green, wildflowers are blooming everywhere in so many colors and as usual wildlife mothers (birds and mammals) are raising a new generation, carrying on the life cycle as Mother Nature intends. During June there were many severe storms with heavy rains and temperatures have been up and down like a roller coaster. We still are experiencing chilly nights and high temperatures during the day.

June, like every other month this year has been very busy at the Conservancy as well as for many of our partner environmental groups. Lots of issues and activities.

Old Growth Forests Executive Order

The Executive Order signed by the President and aimed at protecting the United States' forests, especially old-growth forests has created a lot of confusion, and everyone is waiting for definitions and guidance from the administration. The order directs the Department of the Interior to inventory the old-growth forests on federal lands over the course of the next year and identify the threats to these trees along with ways to better safeguard them. The Public Lands Committee will be monitoring the process and progress as the Forest Service implements the requirements of the Executive Order.

Gauley Healthy Forest Restoration Project

The United States Forest Service has reached out to update interested parties and to notify them that a decision has been signed for the Gauley Healthy Forest Restoration Project on the Monongahela National Forest's Gauley Ranger District. The primary purpose of the project is to improve forest stands by developing healthy stands that are more resistant to insects, disease, and fire. Proposed actions by the FS were designed alongside partners to meet this goal from comments and inputs received from partners. The Conservancy submitted comments on the project and the Public Lands Committee is reviewing the final document against our recommendations. The FS did state that they are looking forward to further collaboration as they move toward implementation and monitoring and the Conservancy has signed up to be a part of that process. Project information and documentation is available at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57335>.

Forest Service Invests \$6M in Deferred Maintenance Projects in West Virginia

The Monongahela National Forest has received \$6 million in funding from the 2020 Great American Outdoors Act to support seven deferred maintenance projects across the Forest in 2022.

Forest Supervisor Shawn Cochran stated that the planning for these projects began in 2021 and the Forest Service is now ready to begin construction. The construction will cause some temporary disruptions,

but the long-term benefits of greater access and safety will make it all worthwhile.

The Seven Forest Service Deferred Maintenance Projects are:

- Cranberry Wilderness Public Access Project, Bridge Replacement over Williams River at Tea Creek (Pocahontas County)
- Shavers Fork of the Cheat Public Access and Habitat Improvement Project, Culvert Replacement and Bridge Construction on Forest Road 209 (Randolph County)
- Lake Sherwood Campground, Outdoor Recreation Project, Campground Rehabilitation (Greenbrier County)
- Marlinton/White Sulphur District Habitat Improvement Projects, Culvert Replacement on Forest Roads 296 and 298 in Laurel Run and Forest Road 999 in Williams River (Greenbrier and Pocahontas County)
- Cranberry Wilderness Public Access Project, Bridge Replacement at Tumbling Rock Run along Cranberry River (Nicholas and Pocahontas County)
- Dolly Sods Wilderness Public Access Project, Bridge Replacement over Red Creek (Grant, Randolph and Tucker County)
- Tea Creek Mountain Trails Public Access Project, Trail Improvements (Grant, Greenbrier, Pocahontas, Randolph and Tucker County)

Information concerning the projects can be found at:

Updates about construction activities and safety alerts.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/alerts/mnf/alerts-notice/?aid-72282>

Additional information about Forest Service implementation of the Great American Outdoors Act.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/gaoa>

The Public Lands Committee has inquired about the possibility of collaboration on these projects.

Outings Planned for the Summer

The Conservancy has planned four great outings over the next few months. They are described in another section of the Voice with instructions on how to participate. Watch for a couple more that are being considered. I plan to attend all four and look forward to seeing many of you there.

Thanks again to all of our members and supporters for your continued support which makes what we have done at the Highlands Conservancy for over 54 years possible. July will be another busy month at the Conservancy as well as for other environmental organizations as we continue to work with on various issues and projects throughout the Highlands. Enjoy *The Highlands Voice* as we report on the issues and happenings in or affecting the Highlands Please stay safe during the summer season and get out there and enjoy all the Highlands have to offer.

More about the Cheat River dam (Continued from p. 1)

Cheat River from an open sewer (if you want to be dramatic about it) or a seriously impaired waterway (if you want to be clinical and bureaucratic) into a river that supports fish and other aquatic life, as well as fishing, boating, kayaking, etc.

The effort got a big boost in 2019 when the Friends of the Cheat was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the DTE Energy Foundation. DTE Energy is a Detroit-based diversified energy company involved in the development and management of energy-related businesses and services nationwide. Its Foundation provides support for various public service initiatives.

The effort is also being supported through the National Fish Passage Program, administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Fish Passage Program provides financial and technical assistance to partners across the country.

The removal is not something that will happen immediately.



Photo: Friends of the Cheat

There have been studies concerning exactly how the dam would be removed and there will have to be more review before it is time for concrete to fly. There is also the matter of money. The project has been awarded a one million dollar grant from the United States

Fish and Wildlife Service. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has applied for a grant and a grant application has been submitted to the Abandoned Mine Lands program.

While the process may be long, all appearances are that the dam will be removed. The Fish and Wildlife Service supports removal. The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources supports removal. The Preston County Commission supports removal. Nobody has come out against it. While it may not be tomorrow, it appears that the Friends of the Cheat is well on its way to taking another step in its decades long quest to restore the Cheat River to its former glory.

All You Need to Know about ATVs on Public Lands

The Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance Conservation Hub is a source for all manner of information on conservation issues of public concern. While much of the information it presents is public information, that public information is scattered among different locations. The Conservation Hub brings the information together and presents it in a way that is easy to understand.

One of the projects that the Conservation Hub has undertaken is All Terrain Vehicles on public lands. If you want pictures, there are pictures. If you want to know what it costs to build a trail or maintain one, that information is there. If you want to know what impact ATVs have on wildlife, water quality, or endangered species, that information is there. You want maps, they've got maps.

The nutshell version of the Conservation Hub's presentation on ATVs (a position which the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy shares) is this:

- Our public lands are places of rest, solitude, peacefulness, and refuge, not the noise and disruption that come with Off-Road Vehicles (ORVs).

- ORV advocates promote one use of public lands while damaging the other values that our public lands have. ORVs don't fit with the traditional non-motorized uses of our public lands.
- Protective rules that have long been established for our public lands would have to be substantially relaxed to allow ORV use.
- There are documented impacts of ORV use on soil, vegetation, water, air, wildlife, and people.
- There are numerous examples of the cost for constant repair and restoration where ORVs have been used.
- There is a demonstrated need for constant monitoring/policing of the activities where ORVs are used. Who would pay the costs of such monitoring/policing?

To see all the information, go to
<https://conservation-abra.hub.arcgis.com/pages/wv-publiclands-orv>

Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Update

By Dave Johnston

The Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards are springing into the summer busy season at West Virginia's most popular wilderness. Here is a recap of activities during June and plans for the summer.

Trailhead Stewards

During May we held a training for about 30 new Trailhead Stewards, and hosted a picnic get-together for all Stewards. The three-hour training gave new Stewards a thorough grounding the historic and natural background of Dolly Sods, its relationship with surrounding natural areas, and the issues confronting its wilderness character. Trainees also gained from the previous year of experience at the trailheads, with experienced Stewards sharing their learnings and techniques for engaging visitors and passing along vital information in a short conversation.

But the classroom training is not the end. In order to complete their training, new Stewards meet up with an experienced Steward at a trailhead. There they have a chance to observe the veteran in action, and how he or she initiates and sustains an engagement, while working in key messages about wilderness stewardship. The new Steward then gets a change to try it, and get critiques, tips and suggestions from the veteran. They come away not only with a feel for the methods and messages we use, but with confidence they will use to when they take a trailhead on their own.



Frank and Judy O'Hara help a Dolly Sods visitor plan a route.

During late May and June, ten new Trailhead Stewards were brought into the fold, and are now qualified to sign up for trailhead duty on their own and with other Stewards. This gives a much-needed boost to our presence at trailheads during the busy summer season. The new Stewards have begun to pick up the enthusiasm and “vibe” that we get from visitors, especially those new to visiting a wilderness, and the appreciation we get from helping them be prepared for a positive wilderness experience. Here's a comment that Becca, one of the new Stewards, left on the Wilderness Stewards Facebook page after venturing into the wilderness on her own hike:

We arrived Saturday to enter at Bear Rocks Trailhead where we were greeted by none other than our own Dave Johnston and another fellow new steward, Haley, working a trailhead shift. They were quite busy as Saturday was a nice sunny day for the Sods but what really brought me joy was chatting to two separate groups on the trails who, unprompted, shared their appreciation for Dave and Haley's advice and guidance for their day's adventure. One group even going as far to say that they were certain they wouldn't have had as nice of an experience without some of the tips they received.

With the continuing impact of high visitation to Dolly Sods, sometimes we wonder if our efforts are making a difference, and hearing about people voluntarily expressing their appreciation is very reinforcing!

Vests

In order to enhance our visibility and perceived credibility at the trailheads we have obtained spiffy multipocket vests for the Trailhead Stewards to wear. These are in forest green and have been embroidered with a new Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards logo, based on the WVHC spruce, cliff and rising sun logo. They are thin enough to wear in warm weather but can be worn over additional layers on cold and windy days at Bear Rocks.

We finally received our vests in early June and had them embroidered. We are now distributing them as Stewards come to the trailheads. New Stewards receive one as sort of a “diploma” when they arrive to complete their trailhead training.

Not only do these impart a feeling of pride and identity among the Stewards, but we hope these vests will also advance the “branding” of WVHC Wilderness Stewards program and increase recognition and respect for the work we do.

(More on the next page)

More about the Dolly Sods Stewards (Continued from previous page)



Dave Johnston models a new Wilderness Stewards vest and shows off the new embroidered logo.

Solitude Monitoring

As reported in last month's *Voice*, we are looking to expand last year's successful solitude monitoring surveys to use a more advanced, statistically-valid approach this year. Solitude monitoring addresses one of the key elements of wilderness character, an "opportunity for solitude". By hiking designated trails for a specified period of time and recording the number of encounters with other hikers and campers, volunteers can provide the Forest Service with important information used to assess the status of a wilderness in meeting that goal.

Last year's effort followed a "convenience" model, where trails were hiked at a time chosen by the volunteer, on both weekends and weekdays. While this approach provides a useful qualitative indication of the level of solitude, it cannot be used for statistical analysis for comparison of trends over time. The "enhanced" protocol requires more surveys, that survey dates be randomly chosen, and conducted using a more specific and consistent procedure. This will provide the Forest Service with a more robust picture of the opportunity for solitude in Dolly Sods, and allow for tracking of trends from future surveys.

To date, the form and data collection standards have been developed and are undergoing review. We expect to have a training

in mid-July and perform surveys over a several-week period during the summer.

Campsite Inventory

Also as reported last month, we are planning on an extensive and ambitious project to inventory all of the campsites near trails in Dolly Sods. This will require hiking designated trails and stopping at each observed campsite to record detailed observations about its location, size, appropriateness, and level of impact. The Forest Service can then use this information to gauge the overall degree of camping impact in the wilderness, and identify specific sites or "communities" for remediation.

Currently the Forest Service is revising the existing recreation site monitoring protocol to best meet the needs for assessing backcountry campsites in Dolly Sods. A call for volunteers and training is expected later this summer, with the surveying effort conducted later in the year. Once this gets going, we will make more announcements.


Join us!

Would you like to be part of the exiting activities we are doing and planning for the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards? Visit the WVHC website (wvhighland.org) and follow the links to the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards. You can find a sign-up form on the site, and can indicate the programs(s) you are interested in. Once you sign up we will be contacting you once these programs are ready to be implemented.


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 2 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.)





West Virginia Highlands Conservancy 2022 Outing Schedule



OUTING DETAILS	DATE	LOCATION
Candy Darter and Hellbender Snorkeling Tour Snorkel in the Greenbrier River with USFS Forest Fisheries Biologist Chad Landress. Snorkel gear and wetsuits provided by USFS. Medium Difficulty.	Saturday July 16 1 - 3 PM	USFS Office 7409 Staunton Parkersburg Turnpike, Bartow, WV 24920
Watoga Old-Growth Forest Exploration Explore the old-growth forest in Watoga State Park. 4 mile hike along Ann Bailey Overlook trail with biologist/ecologist Doug Wood. Medium Difficulty.	Sunday August 7 1 - 4PM	Ann Bailey Trailhead: Pub Rd 21/4A, White Sulphur Springs, WV 24986
Mushroom Meander Learn about fungi with Dr. Kristen Wickert, professional naturalist and plant pathologist. Easy hike from Canaan Valley Resort Main Lodge.	Sunday August 28 10 -12AM	Canaan Valley Resort, 230 Main Lodge Rd. Davis, WV 26260
Bird Walk on Farm View Trail Labor Day bird watching walk in the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge with bird expert LeJay Graffious. Short walk along an easy trail.	Sunday Sept. 4 11AM - 1PM	Farm View Trailhead Parking at the end of Beall Lane Davis, WV 26260
Annual Fall Review at North Bend State Park Join us for a weekend of an in depth look at Energy in WV, as well as some fun outings. Speakers on hydrogen, solar, nuclear, FERC. Bulk room rate available.	Fri - Sun October 14-16	North Bend SP 202 North Bend State Park Rd, Cairo, WV 26337

Please RSVP on our website
www.WVHighlands.org

Save the Date

And make your room reservation.

The annual Fall Review of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy will be **October 14-16** at North Bend State Park in Cairo, WV.

Featuring:

- The mildly interesting to moderately boring: West Virginia Highlands Conservancy annual meeting and the quarterly Board meeting. The informative and somewhere between interesting and riveting: speakers and presentations
- The fun to way fun: outings and general fun
-

Plan to be there!

Candy Darter and Hellbender Snorkeling Outing

RSVP: Go to wvhighlands.org and click on events

Candy Darter and Hellbender Snorkeling Outing

DATE: July 16, 2022

TIME: 1-3PM

LOCATION: Monongahela National Forest - Greenbrier Ranger District Office, 7409 Staunton Parkersburg Turnpike, Bartow, WV 24920

TRIP LEADE(S): Chad Landress, USFS Forest Fisheries Biologist

TRIP DESCRIPTION (difficulty, distance): Medium difficulty.

NOTE: snorkeling and swimming is optional. **Snorkeling gear and wet suits provided by USFS** (but feel free to bring your own gear). Meet at 1PM at USFS office. Get geared up there and drive a few miles to the East Fork Greenbrier River to snorkel and view wildlife in the river. Prepare to get wet (river shoes, swimsuit, towel, change of clothes) and bring a snack and water. Kids are welcome if accompanied by an adult.

Thank you to the Mon National Forest for their support of our outings program.

NOTE: there are no guarantees that we will see candy darters or hellbenders...but this will be their habitat and we do hope to see them!

But There's More! On page 18 there is a poster about our August Outing. Register for that one the same way.



Sticking Up for Wildlife

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has joined with the American Bird Conservancy and numerous other groups in a formal request to the United States Department of the Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service to ban the use of agricultural pesticides on all National Wildlife Refuges.

The request is based on two facts. First, the entire purpose of the National Wildlife Refuge system is wildlife conservation. Unlike on other public lands, where there may be multiple considerations, the purpose of a Wildlife Refuge is, quite literally, to give wildlife areas of respite, safety, and dependability. The website of the Fish and Wildlife Service's makes the point that "wildlife conservation drives everything, from the purposes for which each refuge was established, to the recreational activities offered, to the resource management tools used."

Second, pesticide use can be deadly to wildlife. A 2013 report concluded that a single seed coated with neonicotinoid insecticide is enough to kill a songbird.

If responded to favorably, the request would begin a long process. It asks that the Department of the Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service establish a rule prohibiting the use of pesticides. A rule must be developed, published as a draft rule, public comments received, etc. before it became final rule.

Appalachian Power Weighs in on Carbon Capture

Earlier this year *The Highlands Voice* was home to a mini debate on the usefulness of carbon capture and storage as a tool to slow climate change. The December, 2021, January, 2022, and February, 2022, issues all had letters or stories on the topic. Judging by the *Voice* contributors, the score is now 2-1 against. Now Appalachian Power has weighed in.

Carbon Capture and Storage is a technology that adds equipment to industrial facilities (mostly power plants). The equipment is supposed to extract carbon dioxide from the exhausts of the facilities. The carbon dioxide is then either used for some industrial purpose or stored deep underground.

The pro side of the carbon capture and storage is that there are some situations where there is no good alternative to the production of carbon dioxide. For those situations, we need to be able to capture the carbon dioxide. The con side is that it is too expensive and, in spite of substantial public subsidies, has never been shown to work.

Now Appalachian Power has told West Virginia's Public Energy Authority that it has been there, done that, and doesn't want to try it again. Chris Beam, its president and chief operating officer, told the Public Energy Authority that it had tried the technology, had lost a lot of money doing it, and had little enthusiasm for doing it again.

An Appalachian Power plant was part of a United States Department of Energy funded program from 2009 to 2011. It withdrew from the program after the initial phase.

Mr. Beam offered the opinion that the technology needs to improve to the point that it does not require so much energy to extract the carbon dioxide..



The Highlands Voice is published monthly by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Articles, letters to the editor, graphics, photos, poetry, or other information for publication should be sent to the editor via the internet or by the U.S. Mail by the last Friday of each month. You may submit material for publication either to the address listed above or to the address listed for Highlands Voice Editor elsewhere in this issue. Electronic submissions are preferred.

The Highlands Voice is always printed on recycled paper. Our printer uses 100% post consumer recycled paper when available.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy web page is www.wvhighlands.org.

Tell a Friend!

If you have a friend you would like to invite to join the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy just fill out this form and send it to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

Person you wish to refer: _____

Address: _____

Email _____

Your name: _____

Filling out the form, etc. is, of course, the old school way of doing things. If you prefer, just email the information to Chrys Bauer at WVHC50@gmail.com.

The way it works: Anyone you refer gets *The Highlands Voice* for six months. At the end of the six months, they get a letter asking if they want to join. If they join, we're happy. If not, then maybe next time.

Doing Something about Abandoned Gas Wells

Do you have an oil and gas well operated by Diversified Energy on your property? If it is not producing, we want to hear from you -- and we can maybe help you get it plugged!

The Ohio River Valley Institute (ORVI) recently released a report entitled [*Diversified Energy: A Business Model Built to Fail Appalachia*](#). Over the last several years, Diversified Energy has become the largest owner of oil and gas wells in the country! However, Diversified is not, for the most part, in the business of drilling new wells. It is buying up existing, declining wells and milking them now for all they are worth. But in the future thousands of their wells will not be producing enough gas to even pay to operate themselves, let alone to save the money to plug them.

Diversified already has a little more than 2000 wells in West Virginia right now that should already have been plugged! They only plugged 75 of these wells since January last year. Their disclosures to their stockholders (in Great Britain) raise a question whether thousands more that will need plugging will be coming, and whether Diversified will have the money in the future to plug somewhere around 10,000 wells in West Virginia that reach the end of their economic lives. We think they will become orphaned wells.

If you have a Diversified well on your land, and if it is not producing, please get hold of us. We would like to help to try to get it plugged while some money is still available, or by some other means, rather than have it left unplugged on you. Contact us through lawyer and co-founder Dave McMahon whose contact information is at the bottom of this email.

Generally you will know if the well on your land is operated by Diversified because it will have Diversified's name on it. If it does not and you still suspect it might be a Diversified well then:

There are two ways we can find out if the Diversified well on your land is producing (and if it is in fact operated by Diversified). One, you can send us your surface tax ticket or the information on it (we would need the county, district name, map and parcel number from that). Two, another more certain way to make sure we have the right well is for you to go to the well and get the API number off of the well. That number will look like 047 - 0__ - 0 _____. (Other numbers that don't look like that can be an old company well number of an equipment part number) Get us that API number. Here is [a web page about API numbers](#). Or that page tells you how you can look up the information yourself on the West Virginia Geologic and Economic Survey website and others.

While you are there at the well listen to hear if it is making a hissing sound in the pipes. That will mean that it is producing and we may not be able to get it plugged soon, but if you have other questions about it let us know. (If it is making a hissing sound as gas is escaping out of the pipes into the air, be sure to contact us!)

If there is a no sound it may not be producing and, again, let us know about it -- we might be able to do something to get it plugged to stop devaluing your land or before it pollutes your surface land, groundwater, air etc,

Note: This article suggests the possibility that someone consider litigation to address a problem with an unplugged gas well. Lawyers are bound by ethical rules concerning suggesting that anyone pursue litigation or soliciting legal business. To avoid any lawyer ethical problems, or even the appearance of impropriety, this communication should be considered as ADVERTISING MATERIAL. We also have to note that the lawyer responsible for the content of this message is David McMahon, a co-founder of West Virginia Surface Owners Rights Organization. His number is 304-415-4288. His address is 1624 Kenwood Rd, Charleston, WV 25314. His email is wvdavid@wvdavid.net. He is the person to contact about the well on your property.

The Highlands Voice: It's Not Just for Reading Any More

The Highlands Voice is the main way that the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy communicates with its members. But we would like to communicate with more than our members. We have a valuable perspective and information; we would like to communicate with everybody. We still offer electronic delivery. If you would prefer to receive it electronically instead of the paper copy please contact Dave Saville at WVHC50@gmail.com. With electronic delivery, you will receive a link to a pdf of the Voice several days before the paper copy would have arrived.

No matter how you receive it, please pass it along. If electronically, share the link. If paper, hand it off to a friend, leave it around the house, leave it around the workplace. It's not just for reading. It's for reading and passing along.

Boondoggle: The Appalachian Blue Hydrogen and Carbon Capture Hub

Why the oil and gas industry, the Biden administration, the AFL-CIO, and even some environmental groups support spending billions of taxpayer dollars on an economic and environmental absurdity

By Sean O'Leary

The names read like a progressive dream team – Joe Biden, Senators Ron Wyden and Tina Smith, the National Wildlife Federation, the Clean Air Task Force, Obama administration luminaries Ernest Moniz and Gina McCarthy, and the AFL-CIO. But strangely these progressive lions are united with the decidedly non-progressive oil and gas industry on one issue, their support for a blue hydrogen and carbon capture hub in the heavily fracked greater Ohio Valley where a third of the nation's natural gas is produced.

Why the strange bedfellows? The political appeal of a project that would purportedly reduce carbon emissions while also preserving coal and gas jobs in economically depressed Appalachia is compelling for politicians and advocacy organizations. Plus there are obvious financial benefits that go with catering to an industry that is among the nation's most generous donors to politicians and organizations. In fact, the benefits are so great that they make the cost and environmental drawbacks of the proposed hub seem almost irrelevant.

But, for those of us in the general public who aren't part of that circle of mutual benefit and who would have to absorb the financial and environmental costs of the proposed hub, the drawbacks are too big to ignore. As is the fact that the proposed hub would also get in the way of better, less expensive ways to reduce carbon emission and create jobs.

What is a blue hydrogen and carbon capture hub?

The core element of the proposed Appalachian hydrogen and carbon capture hub is a pipeline network that would transport carbon that is captured not just in the manufacture of hydrogen, but also from coal and gas-fired power plants, petrochemical plants, and other facilities to points in the region where it would be injected for

There are many problems with the imagined hydrogen and carbon capture hub. Three stand out.

- The cost is prohibitive to the point that the hub probably won't be built. But, if it is built, the cost in increased annual taxes and utility bills would be in the hundreds and perhaps the thousands of dollars per household.
- Carbon capture technology is unproven.

Even if its most ambitious goals are met, it would probably capture little more than half the carbon currently being emitted by facilities that could theoretically use the hub.

- If the hub were built, it would contribute almost nothing in the way of jobs and prosperity.

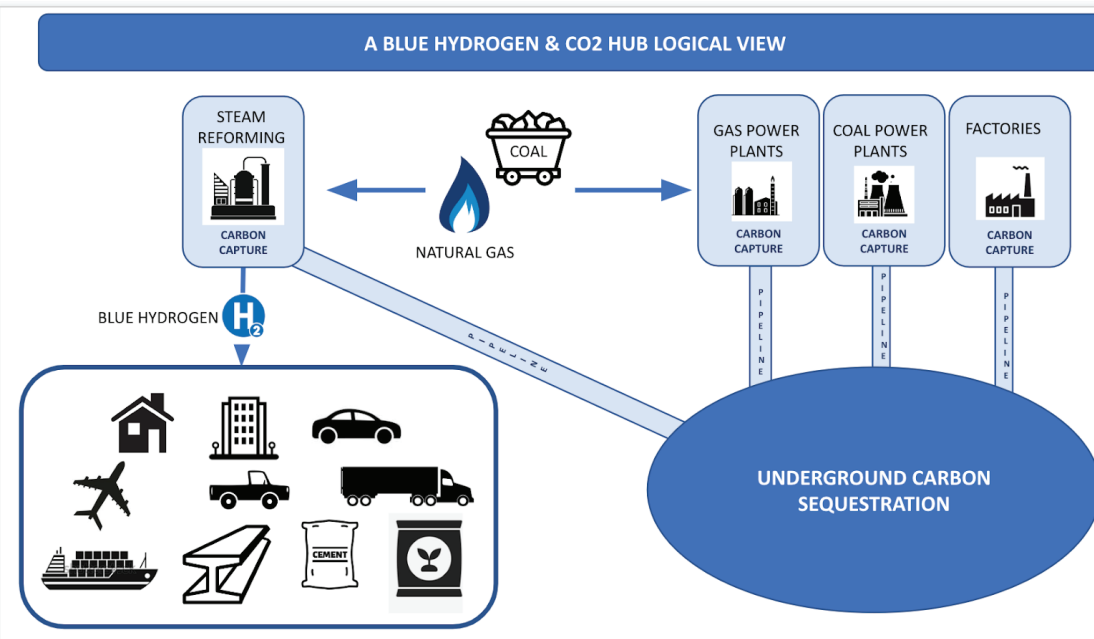
The Cost: They can move it around, but they can't make it go away

According to the [White House Council on Environmental Quality](#) (WHCEQ), the pipeline

networks for this and three other carbon capture hubs would cost between \$170 billion and \$230 billion just to construct. But that figure is dwarfed by the additional investment in carbon capture technology that would have to be made by plant owners whose costs to operate and maintain their retrofitted plants would also rise significantly.

A recent [Ohio River Valley Institute brief](#) found that retrofitting just the nation's coal and gas-fired power plants for carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) would

(Not finished yet; go to the next page)



permanent storage in underground saline caverns. Meanwhile, the hydrogen that would be produced from methane could theoretically be used in a variety of industries, creating a larger market for fracked natural gas.

There is no single plan for the hub's design and footprint, but all parties agree that it would entail the construction of hundreds of miles of dedicated pipelines to connect power plants, factories, and natural gas processing facilities throughout the region with injection points for underground storage.

More about Hydrogen (Continued from previous page)

add approximately \$100 billion per year to Americans' electric bills, an increase of 25%. The cost of adding CCS to steel mills, cement plants, factories, and other carbon producing facilities could be that much again or more.

In West Virginia, where the electric system is dominated by coal, the impact would be much worse, increasing the average monthly utility bill by 63% or \$736 per year. But there's another problem.

No business wants to take on unnecessary costs, which is why, despite forty years of federal government funding for research and development, CCS and blue hydrogen are rarely found in commercial settings and, in the case of power generation, they are not found at all. Consequently, even if the federal government invests hundreds of billions of dollars to build the pipeline infrastructure required to transport and sequester captured carbon, the putative customers of that infrastructure—power plants and factories—would still have no incentive to install CCS. In fact, they would put themselves at a competitive disadvantage by doing so.

The most popular solution to this problem among policymakers is to grant industry a massive taxpayer subsidy combined with relaxed environmental and safety regulations, an assumption by the public of legal liability, and legislation that would ease the way for the use of eminent domain for pipeline construction.

The proposed subsidy, which is contained in the stalled federal reconciliation bill, would pay companies \$85/metric ton of captured and sequestered carbon. By most calculations, this is more than the actual cost of carbon capture, making it a 100%+ subsidy. WHCEQ also suggests that states can help promote CCS by adopting off-take agreements for CCS-equipped power plants, which would guarantee that we would pay well-above market rates for

the electricity the plants produce. WHCEQ also encourages states to help the industry by cutting property taxes, severance taxes, gross receipt taxes, and sales taxes. And the administration is encouraging states to shift regulatory responsibility for assuring the safety of carbon pipelines from the federal government to state agencies, such as the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

None of these measures would reduce the underlying cost of CCS and the hydrogen hubs. Many would increase it and shift the inherent risks associated with carbon pipelines to the public. And they would result in much of the cost of CCS and blue hydrogen being recovered through our tax bills rather than our electric bills, making it less obvious.

Carbon capture doesn't work very well and would leave us with a massive GHG and local pollution problem

Perhaps more damning than the cost of carbon capture is the fact that it doesn't do a very good job of reducing emissions and other forms of pollution, which have long damaged our region and the health of residents.

First, the hydrogen hub and the production of blue hydrogen would do nothing to mitigate upstream emissions associated with fracking and the transportation and processing of natural gas and methane. They would also miss entirely plants and factories whose owners see no advantage in installing CCS.

Second, even after CCS technologies have been installed and put into operation, they are expected to capture only about 90% of the emissions at the plants where they are installed. Existing pilot projects have regularly captured only two-thirds or less.

Finally, depending on the type of CCS technology that is deployed, pollution from nitrogen oxide, volatile organic compounds, and other hazardous pollutants

would continue and may worsen, especially if implementation of carbon capture helps increase production from fracking.

An Appalachian hydrogen and carbon capture hub would do little to stimulate job growth and prosperity

The hydrogen hub's most noticeable effect would be a perpetuation of the coal industry and the possible expansion of the gas industry. But that only amounts to locking in an economy that is already causing the region to shed jobs and population. The structural inability of the natural gas industry to deliver job growth was amply documented in a 2021 ORVI report titled [“Destined to Fail: Why the Appalachian natural gas boom failed to deliver jobs and prosperity and what it teaches us.”](#)

In contrast, [clean energy transition](#) with an emphasis on renewable resources, distributed generation, and energy efficiency improvements to homes and buildings would cost less, eliminate emissions, stimulate job growth in the tens of thousands, reduce utility bills, increase disposable incomes, and improve the quality of life in both public and private spaces by making them safer and more comfortable. The clean energy approach would also free up vast sums of money that could be used to compensate workers, families, and communities directly affected by reductions in fossil fuel industries. **We've been down this path of promised prosperity by subsidizing industry before**

West Virginia has been tantalized before by promises that new industries and technologies would produce jobs and prosperity.

The Appalachian natural gas boom was one such instance, but it has had [little impact](#) on jobs and population. We heard the same story about an imagined Appalachian Storage Hub and petrochemical cluster that was supposed to usher in what the

(A little more on the next page)

Hydrogen: the rest of the story (Continued from previous page)

Department of Energy called a “manufacturing renaissance”. But the storage hub, the ASCEND cracker in Wood County, and the PTT cracker in Belmont County, Ohio never came to fruition. The only major project that has, the Shell ethane cracker in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, has had no measurable economic impact.

That’s why we should be skeptical when many of the same voices that promoted those failed visions now champion the Ohio River Valley Hydrogen and Carbon Capture Hub. And they have a prominent new participant. Former Obama administration Energy Secretary, Ernest Moniz, is ubiquitous in hydrogen and carbon capture hub advocacy. His work and that of his organization, [Energy Futures Initiative](#), was cited by the White House Council on Environmental Quality. He co-authored hub-related reports as part of the [Labor Energy Partnership](#), and he was a keynote speaker at the [Ohio River Valley Hydrogen and CCS Hub Market Workshop](#), which was attended by Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH).

Mega technological projects are a passion for Dr. Moniz, many of which have become mega busts. Dr. Moniz was a major proponent of adding nuclear reactors at [Plant Vogtle in Georgia](#), a project which was supposed to cost \$14 billion and go online by 2018, but which now has a price tag of over \$30 billion and is still not online. He also championed the \$7 billion Kemper coal gasification project in Mississippi. But, after years of delays, the plant never operated as promised, its cost ballooned by more than \$4 billion, and last year Kemper’s owner, Southern Company, gave up and began [demolishing the plant’s gasification equipment](#).

We can’t afford those kinds of fiascos in our region and we can’t afford more industry bonanzas like the natural gas boom, which fulfilled none of its promises of jobs and prosperity. Whether the goal is emission reduction, jobs, or affordability, the proposed Ohio River Valley hydrogen hub is a bad solution that gets in the way of good ones.



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WEB PAGE – DIGITAL PUBLISHING: Dan Radmacher, (540) 798-6683,

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

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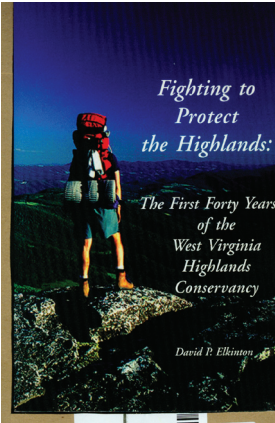
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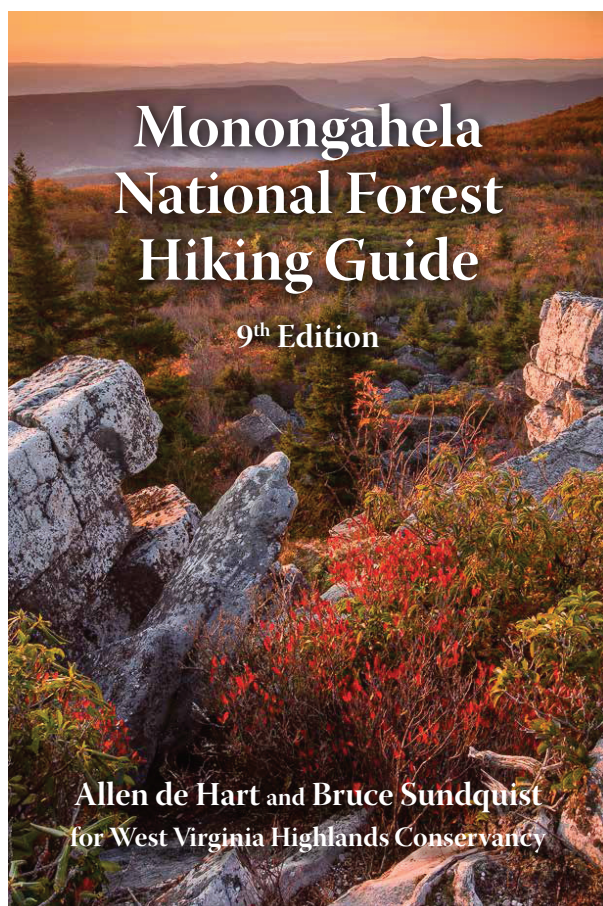
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Royal Mimicry: Entomology Meets Etymology

By Katherine McFerrin and John McFerrin

Summertime in North America is the breeding season for the Monarch butterfly, West Virginia's state butterfly. Monarchs have a bold wing pattern of black borders outlining orange teardrop shaped patches and white spots dotting the edges of their wings. The northeastern U.S. is a pit stop before heading south to their overwintering grounds in southwestern Mexico. Although monarchs are best known for their arduous 3,000 mile migration, the Monarch, along with the Viceroy butterfly, is also one of nature's best examples of mimicry.

The mimicry even extends to their names. The Monarch is, of course, the king or queen. The word Viceroy has its roots in an old French term for the assistant to the king. In the old days, when Britannia ruled the waves and England had an empire, various far flung colonies were overseen by viceroys who were in India, Ireland, North America, etc. in place of the king. The king (or queen) was the ruler; the viceroy was there in his or her stead. In the butterfly world, the Viceroy looks very much like the Monarch and, in appearance at least, could take its place.

Mimicry is when a species, the mimic, resembles another species, the model, to avoid predation. In the case of the Viceroy and Monarch, this mimicry has roots in the Monarch's ability to dissuade predators through chemical defenses and color. Monarch larvae eat milkweed plants, which contain cardiac glycosides, aka cardenolides. This makes Monarchs poisonous to predators, such as birds. To warn predators, Monarchs display aposematic coloring, specifically their bright orange color acts as a signal that the butterflies are poisonous. When a predator eats a Monarch or even part of a Monarch's wing,

the cardenolides may cause the predator to vomit or go into cardiac arrest. Over time, predators associate the warning color with the bad experience.

Even though they don't share the Monarchs' chemistry, Viceroy's ride their coattails, so to speak. Although Viceroy's have their own chemical defenses, appearing similar to Monarchs gives them the benefit of the Monarchs' chemical defenses in deterring predators as well as their own. In the butterfly world, looking as if you are poison can be as good as actually being poison.

At a glance, Monarchs and Viceroy's appear the same with bright orange shapes, black lines and white spots. There are, however, visual differences. Viceroy's can be up to 1.5 inches smaller than Monarchs, and Viceroy's have a distinct black line across their hind wings. A more noticeable difference is their flight patterns. Viceroy's fly in a quick and erratic flapping motion that keeps them closer to the ground, whereas Monarchs appear to float with a flap-flap-glide rhythm that allows them to fly at greater heights.

They are also around at different times of the year. Monarchs migrate yearly to Mexico and southern California, but Viceroy's do not migrate. In the northeastern U.S., Monarchs usually arrive in mid to late June with Monarch sightings peaking in the fall as the butterflies begin to migrate south. Viceroy's typically emerge by late May.

Taken together, the physical appearances, flight patterns and seasonality of Monarchs and Viceroy's can be used to distinguish the two despite their strikingly similar coloring. You can tell which is the real king and which is there in place of the king.



**Monarch (left) and Viceroy (right)
Or is it the other way around?**

An Unsettled Settlement and One Solution

By Hugh Rogers

The West Virginia Division of Highways has taken note of local opposition to its Revised Original Preferred Alternative (ROPA) for Corridor H. Recently, it has circulated documents making two points: the 2000 Settlement Agreement allowed it to revert to its original alignment; the alternative routes it studied have various flaws.

It is true that the agreement permitted disagreement over the final outcome in the Parsons-to-Davis section. Thus, the lawsuit has only been postponed. Defendants could throw away the alternatives they had designed. Plaintiffs could sue to enforce the federal law protecting a National Register-eligible historic district, the Blackwater Industrial Complex. Let's look at how it happened.

The towns of Thomas and Davis and the historic district along the North Fork of the Blackwater River form a rough triangle. Corridor H (US 48) approached from the east, ending just north of Davis. It was planned to continue west beyond Thomas. How should it get there? Could the highway alleviate traffic problems without impinging on the most sensitive areas?

Two issues were prominent. The first was to maintain the integrity of the historic site and its surrounding landscape—including Blackwater Falls State Park and Monongahela National Forest—free from the noise, lights, and physical intrusions of 21st Century transportation. The second was the problem of heavy trucks pounding through historic Thomas. They're hard on streets and buildings, and they threaten the foot traffic the town's economy depends on.

These issues were to be addressed in our Settlement Agreement. The relevant part begins with this requirement: "Federal Highway Administration and West Virginia Department of Transportation will prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to evaluate one or more alignment shifts for the *Thomas-Davis Section* of the Parsons-to-Davis Project." (Emphasis added.) (Here, we refer to WVDOT's Division of Highways, DOH.)

From the original twelve possible alignments, six were "retained for detailed environmental study and analysis" in the Draft (2002) and Final (2007) Environmental Impact Statements. All six passed north of

Thomas and met US 219 west of town.

From there, they went downhill—literally and figuratively. DOH tacked onto the different options the same long tail along the side of Backbone Mountain below Tucker County High School.

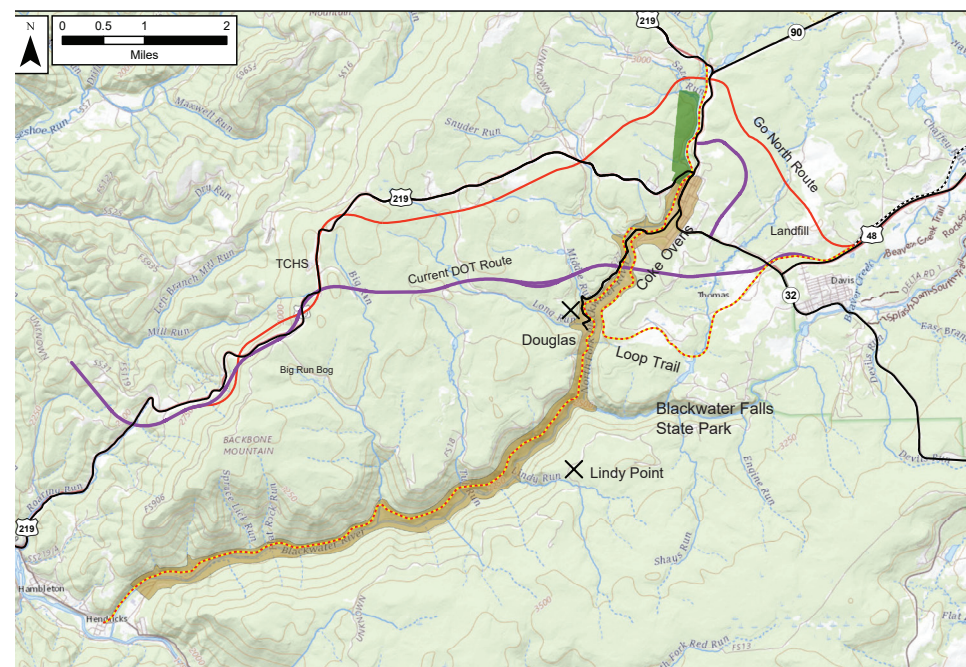
That route was supposed to avoid habitat for the endangered flying squirrel, but it did not. It plowed through "highly suitable" squirrel territory. Now DOH wants to use that flaw and others to handicap the Northern Route around Thomas. It says the alternatives are a mile longer, lack a connector to the high school, cross trout streams, and require giant cuts and side-hill fills in unstable soils.

These objections are irrelevant to the Thomas-Davis Section.

Some of DOH's other comparisons between the alternatives and their Revised Original Preferred Alignment are simply false. For instance, "The Northern Alternatives fill over twice the acreage of ... forested wetlands." Only one of the surviving alternatives would fill more of those particular wetlands than the ROPA. In fact, the ROPA would fill six and a half times as much total wetland area as Alternative 1D, our Northern Route.

And their comparisons miss the point on likely impacts of the ROPA. They write that tourist access from north, east, and south would not change. What *would* change is the draw and the experience—if the landscape is blighted; if instead of bringing people to the destination, the highway carries them over it; if an interchange with Route 32 generates the sort of strip mall sprawl between the towns that we see along Corridor G south of Charleston (which DOH cites as positive economic development).

The towns on the mountain are different. Davis's Draft Comprehensive Plan declares its first priority: "*Preserve the unique character and integrity of Davis* throughout any growth and development that may occur. *Protect its existing assets*: the natural landscape and rural beauty, dark skies, community centers and



Corridor H Choices
2022

(More on the next page)

Corridor H Keeps Rolling (Continued from previous page)

parks, the small town atmosphere and safe environment for children.” (Emphasis in original.)

To address Thomas’s priority, reducing truck traffic through town, DOH has offered a “Truck Route” separate from Corridor H. But its location near the school and library is dubious, its funding is uncertain, and its timing is unknown. It is unnecessary. Corridor H is the real truck bypass.

Supposing we cut off the Northern Route’s ill-designed tail—what then? An obvious solution would be to build the route around Thomas to US 219 west of town and improve the existing road from there—at least until a viable route down the mountain can be found.

DOH has mentioned karst (limestone) topography as a problem on the Backbone Mountain portion of the northern alternatives. It has not admitted the difficulties it would face with the crumbly Mauch

Chunk formation lying under its own ROPA. The least disturbance the better, in that geology.

But wasn’t the old Improved Roadway Alternative foreclosed by the Settlement Agreement? No. We did agree not to object *in court* that their upcoming Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) will not consider that alternative. Nothing prevents us from pointing out to the public and our representatives that an IRA is the best way down the mountain. On that issue, we can’t litigate but we can agitate.

What the SEIS *must* do is comply with the Settlement Agreement and focus on the Thomas-Davis Section. Then it will be clear that the Northern Route around Thomas would best serve the towns and protect the historic Blackwater area.

Rick Webb Named Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance Director

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Board member Rick Webb has been selected as the Big Cheese (aka Executive Director) of the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance. This is the position previously held by Lew Freeman who resigned in May, 2022, after having served in that position since 2014.

Rick is an environmental scientist and advocate with a long-time focus on the Central Appalachian Highlands. Rick worked against the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline as Coordinator of the Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition and as part of the team that developed ABRA’s Pipeline Compliance Surveillance Initiative. Since the defeat of the pipeline, he has worked on the development of ABRA’s Conservation Hub.

The Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance (ABRA) is a coalition of conservation organizations dedicated to promoting and protecting the environmental integrity of the Allegheny-Blue Ridge region. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is one of its members.

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

Please email any poems, letters, commentaries, etc. to the VOICE editor at johnmcferrin@aol.com or by real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

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Afternoon Town

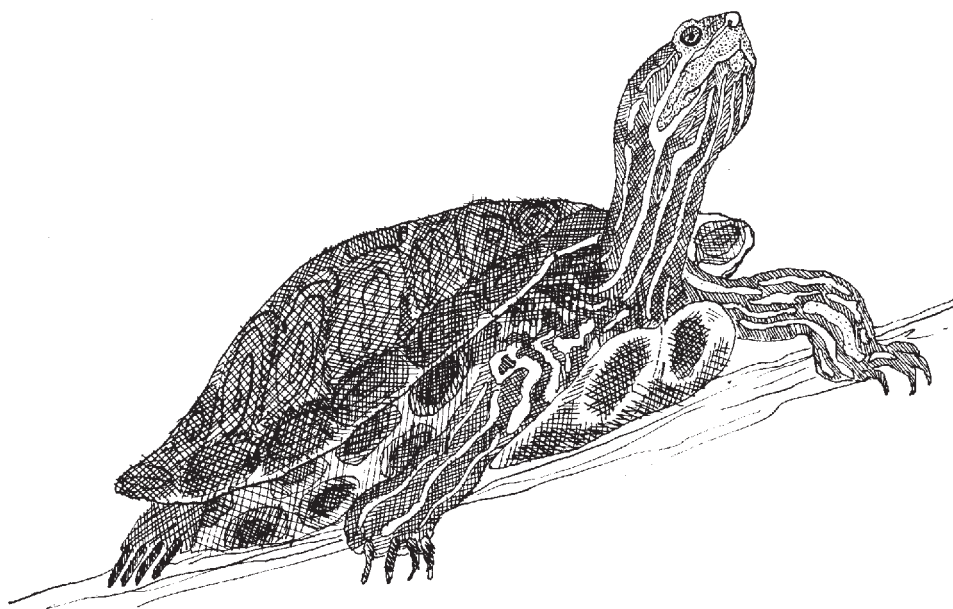
By Lenore Coberly

A squirrel sees me, stops
each cheek stretched by an acorn,
then disappears under a hemlock,
his drawn mouth, funny, forlorn.

Monarchs crown butterfly bushes,
in their migratory ballet,
then leave the regal flowers
to bees and dance away.

A house, the art of family,
softened by screens of leaves,
has welcomed the birds who came
to make their home in the eaves.

A peaceful place,
this afternoon town,
before its Monday pace
before the rain comes down.



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States Get More Say over Water Permits

By John McFerrin

States, including West Virginia, have gained more control over the issuance of permits under the federal Clean Water Act.

Under the federal and state Clean Water Acts, anybody who wants to undertake a wide variety of activities which have an impact upon water must have a permit. These include discharging water into a stream, filling a stream, or crossing a stream or a wetland. Most recently this requirement has meant that both the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline have been required to have permits for pipeline construction.

These permits are issued by federal agencies. Under the law as it historically existed, even when federal agencies issue permit decisions, states still had a role. Under Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act, federal agencies could not authorize projects in a state unless that state certifies (called a 401 Certification) that the project will not violate state water quality standards.

Our most recent experiences with this are the Mountain Valley Pipeline, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. With those two pipelines, or any other project where federal agencies issue water permits, West Virginia could have stopped the project by refusing the 401 Certification. If it did not want to refuse the 401 Certification outright, it could have conditioned its approval on the pipeline developers taking certain steps to protect water quality.

The reason for this requirement of state certification were explained during the original debates on the federal Clean Water Act. Senator Muskie explained on the floor when what is now §401 was first proposed: “No polluter will be able to hide behind a Federal license or permit as an excuse for a violation of water quality standard[s]. No polluter will be able to make major investments in facilities under a Federal license or permit without providing assurance that the facility will comply with water quality standards. No State water pollution control agency will be confronted with a fait accompli by an industry that has built a plant without consideration of water quality requirements.”

In the spring of 2020, the United States Environmental Protection Agency issued a new rule dramatically reducing the authority that states have to refuse certification or demand conditions on permits. This was in response to complaints about other states imposing too many conditions upon pipeline construction or refusing certifications altogether. For the reasons mentioned below, there were no complaints about West Virginia authorities.

Now the United States Environmental Protection Agency has changed the rule back to what it was historically. The states once again have the authority to review federal permits and certify that a project will not cause a violation of water quality standards. If a

project needs conditions to protect state waters, states can demand those conditions.

Does West Virginia really care?

If recent experience is any guide, regaining this authority will not make any difference to West Virginia. Both the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and the Mountain Valley Pipeline had to have permits to cross streams and wetlands in West Virginia. Through the 401 Certification process, West Virginia could have prevented the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission from finally approving the pipeline as well as the United States Army Corps of Engineers from approving the stream crossings, etc. that the pipeline will entail until we had assurance that West Virginia’s water would not be damaged. West Virginia had the opportunity to either stop the project entirely or, more likely, place conditions upon it that would make it less damaging to West Virginia waters.

Instead of reviewing the projects and either rejecting them or placing conditions upon them, West Virginia waived its right to do so. For the details, see the stories in the December, 2017, and January, 2018, issues of *The Highlands Voice*.

While the restoration of authority might make a difference in some states, it is not clear that it will make any difference in West Virginia. When the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection had the authority before, it did not use it. There is nothing to indicate that having it back will make any difference. The current West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection has no interest in using the right which the Clean Water Act grants it anyway.

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.



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The same items are also available at our on-line store: www.wvhighlands.org

T- SHIRTS

White, heavy cotton T-shirts with the **I ♥ Mountains** slogan on the front. The lettering is blue and the heart is red. “West Virginia Highlands Conservancy” in smaller blue letters is included below the slogan. Short sleeve in sizes: S, M, L, XL, and XXL. Long sleeve in sizes S, M, L, and XL. **Short sleeve** model is \$18 by mail; **long sleeve** is \$22. West Virginia residents add 6% sales tax. Send sizes wanted and check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy ATTEN: Online Store, WVHC, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306.