Off Road Vehicles in State Parks? No Way!

By Luanne McGovern

Interim sessions of the West Virginia Legislature are usually pretty humdrum affairs, but this was not the case with the September 2022 session. The Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Subcommittee met on September 11 to hear presentations “Regarding the Use of Off Road Vehicles (ORVs) in State Parks”. Members of the WV Highlands Conservancy and readers of The Highlands Voice know that the WVHC stands firmly opposed to the use of ORVs on public lands.

As soon as the agenda was announced, the WVHC went to work getting the word out to members and partner organizations about the upcoming meeting. Through Facebook postings and action alerts from the West Virginia Environmental Council and WV Rivers, we urged our members and concerned citizens to make sure the Legislators knew where we stand on this issue. And did they ever! Senators and Delegates were inundated with emails and phone calls stating their opposition to ORVs in our beloved state parks. Senators Hamilton and Beach were heard to comment that they had been receiving “hundreds” of messages in the week prior to the meeting – “all against”.

The meeting itself was an odd combination of completely disparate viewpoints. Two presentations were made by out-of-state organizations funded (More on p. 5)
Thoughts from our President
By Larry Thomas

It’s October and Mother Nature is very busy with the annual coloring of the leaves. Driving through the mountains, it is very evident witnessing the annual transformation from green to the scarlet, purple, orange, yellow and brown of the fall foliage. While visiting Lake Buffalo, Spruce Knob Lake, and Spruce Knob during the last week I saw individual trees that were absolutely spectacular. If Mother Nature keeps her pallet working, I believe we are in for a terrific show when the leaves reach their peak. Popular destinations such as Dolly Sods are already crowded with visitors from all over the country.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Hires a Communications Director

Several months ago, John McFerrin, Director, Secretary and Highlands Voice Editor for 20 years, called me to say that he wanted to retire as the Highlands Voice Editor by no later than December 31. After getting over the shock, the board decided that this presented the opportunity to create the position of Communications Director. The responsibilities would include working with the President, Program Director, Membership and Fulfillment Secretary, working committees, and board members; they would lead the external communication efforts of the WVHC, including but not limited to The Highlands Voice, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy website, active social media platforms, direct communications with WVHC members and supporters, and public relations messages to articulate WVHC’s mission consistently.

The Board is pleased to welcome Olivia Miller as Communications Director. Olivia started October 1st. She told me how excited she is to have been selected for this new role for the Conservancy. Olivia is an experienced communicator, writer, graphic designer, social media strategist and digital marketing professional, with a passion for nature, outdoor adventure, and environmental conservation. We are looking forward to the increased emphasis on communications at the Conservancy.

September again saw a whirlwind of activities of interest to the Conservancy.

Off-Road Vehicles on West Virginia Public Lands

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has a long history of opposing Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) use on our West Virginia federal and state public lands and the Legislative Committee is keeping an eye on any action that attempts to promote that issue.

The Members of the Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Subcommittee had an interim Legislative Meeting on September 11 concerning the use of Off-Road Vehicles on West Virginia public lands.

Two out-of-state interests spoke about how Western states expanded off-road vehicle use on vast tracks of land owned by the Bureau of Land Management, trying to make the case that Western methods should work in West Virginia.

Two former West Virginia State Parks administrators, Sam England a retired West Virginia Department of Natural Resources Chief of Parks and retired Park Superintendent Scott Durham, with over 90 combined years of experience between them, testified to set the record straight. They provided testimony on the state of public lands and the implications of off-road vehicle use.

A major revelation in their testimony was that off-road vehicle use on public lands would displace all other forms of recreation on our state lands.

The Conservancy sent a letter to the Subcommittee concerning our position on the use of Off-Road Vehicles on our public lands and identifying the effects and concerns from a study by the United States Geological Survey relating to:

- ORV Effects on Soils and Watersheds
- ORV Effects on Vegetation
- ORV Effects on Wildlife and Habitats
- ORV Effects on Water Quality
- ORV Effects on Air Quality
- Socioeconomic Implications of ORV Use
- Maintenance Cost
- Law Enforcement Cost

To listen to the meeting. West Virginia Senate (slig.net)

WVHC committees continue to be very active. Work is being focused on legislative priorities for the upcoming legislative session which will be here before we know it, Corridor H issues for the sections from Davis and Thomas to Parsons and Wardensville to the Virginia line, Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards and other public lands issues and the upcoming Fall Review. Committee work never ends as we tackle the many issues that affect our environment here in West Virginia.

2022 WVHC Fall Review

The fall review is fast approaching, and the Fall Review Committee has been working very hard putting together the program for the weekend. Information concerning the Fall Review is elsewhere in this issue of the Voice. We hope that many of you can attend this exciting event focused on energy for our future.

Thanks again to all of our members and supporters for your continued support which makes what we do at the Highlands Conservancy (for over 54 years) possible. October will be another busy month at the Conservancy as well as for other environmental organizations as we continue to work 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 fall season and get out there and enjoy all the Highlands have to offer.
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
Annual Fall Review, Oct. 14-16 2022
ENERGY IN WV
North Bend State Park, Cairo, WV

**Friday, October 14:** 6-9 PM Potluck Meet & Greet at Main Pavilion

**Saturday, October 15**

- **6:00 - 7:00 AM** OUTING: Bird Walk with WVHC Board Member Jackie Burns
- **7:00 - 8:00** BREAKFAST
- **8:00 - 9:00** Updates in Solar Technology, Solar Holler
  - BREAK 15 mins.
- **9:15 - 10:15** Recovering Rare Earth Elements from AMD, Dr. Paul Ziemkiewicz
  - BREAK 15 mins.
- **10:30 - 11:30** Transforming Coal Fields to Solar Fields, Eriks Brolis
- **11:30 - 12:00** WVHC Committee Updates
- **12:00 - 1:00 PM** LUNCH
- **1:00 - 2:15** OUTING: North Bend State Park Tour
  - BREAK 15 mins.
- **2:30 - 3:30** Small Modular Nuclear Power, Jessica Lovering
- **3:30 - 4:15** Conserving Wildlife on Pipeline Infrastructure, Jocelyn Phares
  - BREAK 15 mins.
- **4:30 - 6:00** Hydrogen Panel, Sean O'Leary and Andrew Place
- **6:00 - 7:30** DINNER
- **7:30** Keynote Address: James Van Nostrand

**Sunday, October 16**

- **10:00 AM** WVHC Annual Meeting and Election of Officers
  - Board Meeting to Follow (All open to the public)

[www.WVHighlands.org](http://www.WVHighlands.org)
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 Cristyn Bauer 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.

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.)

Learn More About ATV Hearing

If you would like to watch the subcommittee meeting, here is the link: [http://sg001-harmony.sliq.net/00289/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20220911/-1/57474](http://sg001-harmony.sliq.net/00289/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20220911/-1/57474)


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More about Off Road Vehicles (Continued from p. 1)

by the ORV industry – Ben Burr of the Idaho based Blue Ribbon Coalition, and Danielle Fowles-McNiven of Utah based Tread Lightly. (Both organizations are also aligned with Senator Mark Maynard.) The other two presentations were by former WV State Parks employees with a combined state park experience of 93 years – retired WV State Parks Chief Sam England and retired WV State Parks Superintendent Scott Durham (and WVHC member). It was no competition!

The two out-of-state presenters repeated the usual arguments in favor of ORVs – economic development, increased “accessibility” for veterans and people with disabilities, the need to increase West Virginia’s “competitiveness” with neighboring states.

In contrast, Sam and Scott gave a master class on the potential impact of ORVs on state parks, focusing on four areas – economics, fit, environmental impacts and social impacts. They presented updated information of the impact of ORVs on Cabwaylingo State Park and Forest, the only state area that allows their use.

**Economics** – The overall revenue of state parks and forests has increased by 39.6% over the past three years, due to increased pandemic use and the investments made in park infrastructure. In FY22 the overall system generated almost $33 million in revenue, which translated into over $400 million in economic impact to the state. During the same time, Cabwaylingo’s revenue increased by 130%, due to increased visitation. But in spite of this large percentage increase, Cabwaylingo only increased from 30th to 28th place in state parks revenue rankings (see table below). In fact, their revenues were in the same range as Seneca State Forest and Kanawha State Forest, which do not allow ORV use. The conclusion was that allowing ORVs in Cabwaylingo has had only a relatively minor positive economic impact in the WV State Park system. This is a very inaccurate conclusion, as state parks and forests constitute only about 1% of the landmass of WV. Most of the state areas are small in size and already have existing trail structures that would prohibit any further expansion. Many of these areas have restrictive land management relationships (such as the Corps of Engineers) and significant historical or environmental protection concerns. Expansion of ORV trails into these areas is not a proper fit.

**Environmental**

The Mission of the WV State Parks System is “to promote conservation by preserving and protecting natural areas of unique or exceptional scenic, scientific, cultural, archaeological or historical significance, and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the citizens of this state and its visitors”. ORVs have detrimental impacts on flora, fauna, soils and watersheds and introduce noise pollution and invasive species. All of these impacts are contrary to the Mission stated above.

**Social Impacts**

State parks and forests have been set aside for the use of all citizens and are an important contributor to quality of life. ORV use in state lands would seriously and negatively impact the social benefits derived from park use – hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, solitude, peace and harmony with nature. Anecdotal information from Cabwaylingo indicates that the traditional users of the area have been completely displaced by the ORV users, making it into an ORV park, not a state park. Scott Durham gave moving testimony about his experience with the “significant minority” of ORV users that misbehave on state lands and flaunt park rules. Their attitude of “I want to do what I want to do” is completely contradictory to the Mission of our parks.

After their presentations, Scott and Sam were asked repeatedly to return to the podium to answer questions from the Subcommittee. They provided clear and concise answers to all questions, backed by data and a wealth of experience. Notably, neither of the out-of-state presenters were asked a single question. At the end of the meeting, it was clear that the issue of ORVs in State Parks was a complete non-starter. The Legislators heard from you and from the presenters – no ORVs in our state lands!

But this is not to say that the fight against ORVs on state lands is over. Rest assured that Senator Mark Maynard and the ORV industry will continue to try to chip away at this resistance, through clever and seemingly unrelated legislation. The WVHC Legislative Committee will be closely monitoring legislation as it is introduced and taking action before it can advance. Your help on this issue is greatly appreciated!

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**REVENUE COMPARISON**

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<td>$17,214</td>
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**Fit**

One of the arguments presented by the ORV industry is that there are “1000s of acres of unused, undeveloped and dormant lands”
Whip-poor-wills make synchronized trip south

Using GPS tags attached to Eastern Whip-poor-wills, researchers discovered that birds from across the Midwest all traveled a similar migratory path and moved at nearly the same time in the fall, concentrating the population in a small area of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and east Texas on a single day in early October.

That highlights a critical danger to the whip-poor-will population, which has already declined by nearly 70% in recent decades, said Christopher Tonra, co-author of the study and associate professor of avian wildlife ecology at The Ohio State University.

"About half of the entire population of whip-poor-wills breed in the Midwest, and our findings indicate their migration south is very synchronized," he said.

"That suggests we have to protect the forested habitat in that small area of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and east Texas, which is a vital migratory stopover. And we must find ways to protect the birds as they all move through the highly urbanized areas of east Texas," he said.

The study, led by Aaron Skinner, a graduate student at Ohio State, was published recently in the journal "Diversity and Distributions."

Whip-poor-wills are cryptic, seldom-seen nocturnal birds named after the sound of the calls that they make, often for hours at a time, during summer nights in the forests where they breed. Due mostly to this call, whip-poor-wills are a common cultural reference in country songs, poems, stories, and legends.

"I associate whip-poor-wills with camping in eastern forests and hearing them call through the night," Tonra said. "The idea of them disappearing is very alarming, and we’re trying to learn more about what may be causing their decline."

The researchers captured and tagged whip-poor-wills in five breeding areas across four midwestern states: Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio.

The birds were fitted with archival GPS tags, which meant that the researchers had to recapture them the following year to collect the GPS data. (Most whip-poor-wills return to the same breeding site year after year.)

The researchers got usable data from 52 of the 115 birds they tagged in the summers of 2017 and 2019. The study focuses on fall migration because complete data on all 52 birds was only available for the journey south.

Findings showed that, unlike some other species of birds, breeding populations of whip-poor-wills from across the Midwest all share a similar migratory path and travel at about the same time, Tonra said.

The path is so similar that on one date in early October in one year of the study, all the GPS-tagged birds were within about 300 miles of each other in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

“These birds started their journey in four different states, from northern Wisconsin to southern Ohio,” Tonra said.

“To have them all end up so near each other on the same day of migration is remarkable.”

One reason that their paths were so similar is that whip-poor-wills, unlike other species of birds, avoided flying over the Gulf of Mexico to reach Mexico and Central America, the study found. As a result, the birds were concentrated in the small area of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas as they made their way around the Gulf.

This finding shows the importance of forest management efforts in that area of those states, Tonra said.

Four Texas cities in their path

Another issue is that the migratory path takes many whip-poor-wills through four major urban areas in Texas: Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston.

Like many bird species, whip-poor-wills migrate at night and can be disoriented by the bright lights of cities, Tonra said. They often are attracted to the light and end up dying in building collisions.

“Studies show that whip-poor-wills are at particularly high risk for high-rise building collisions and so that could be a significant source of mortality for them, especially in early October,” Tonra said.

Some cities in the United States have instituted “lights out” programs during migration to protect birds that are passing through, he said. Such programs could be particularly helpful in Texas.

Where whip-poor-wills winter

The findings showed that nearly all the birds from the Midwest breeding sites wintered in the same general area in southern Mexico and Guatemala.

(More on the next page)
More about the Whip-poor-wills (Continued from previous page)

In contrast, some species of birds that breed in different areas of the United States and Canada also winter in different areas in Mexico, and Central and South America, Tonra said. These findings have implications for possible causes of the rapid population decline of the species.

Tonra noted that while the overall population of whip-poor-wills is in decline, populations in some breeding areas in the United States are relatively stable, while other populations have disappeared or are in decline.

This fact, coupled with the finding that nearly all the birds wintered in the same area, suggest that whip-poor-wills may face their greatest challenges here in their U.S. breeding grounds, Tonra said.

“If the wintering grounds were the major problem, we should see similar population declines in all their different breeding areas, which is not what is happening,” he said.

One issue may be the decline in insect populations on some of their breeding grounds. Whip-poor-wills are insectivores, eating mostly moths on the wing.

Tonra said the researchers are planning a project to trap moths on current breeding grounds, as well as in areas where whip-poor-wills have disappeared, to see if declines in moth populations may have played a role.

Other co-authors of the study were James Wright, a graduate student, and Stephen Matthews, an associate professor of wildlife landscape ecology, both at Ohio State; Michael Ward, Thomas Benson and Ian Souza-Cole, all from the University of Illinois; and Frank Thompson III from the United States Forest Service.

Funding for the study came from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Association of Field Ornithologists, and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

Thanks to The Ohio State University for providing this news.

This article previously appeared in Birdwatching magazine. Several birders/WVHC members here in WV listened to a webinar by the authors of the study. The Ohio tagging location was just across the border from WV.
Details on the Electric Vehicles Tax Credits

Currently, the tax credit for electric vehicles (EVs) is limited to the first 200,000 customers for each car manufacturer. Tesla and General Motors have already reached that limit and Toyota will shortly. The Inflation Reduction Act eliminates this cap, but requires all electric vehicles be assembled in North America in order to qualify for the tax credit. Any tax credit that is available can be applied at the point of the sale, rather than waiting to file a tax return the following April.

The Electric Vehicles tax credit in the Inflation Reduction Act is up to $7,500 per vehicle, and is split equally into two buckets. The first bucket provides up to half of the tax credit ($3,750) and requires that batteries be manufactured or assembled in North America. In 2023, when the new electric vehicle tax credit becomes effective, 50% of the batteries have to be manufactured or assembled in North America. That increases over time until 2029 when 100% of the batteries must be manufactured or assembled in North America in order to qualify for the tax credit.

The second bucket of up to $3,750 is contingent on where minerals used in the batteries are mined or processed. Beginning in 2023, 40% of these minerals (e.g., lithium, cobalt, and nickel) must be mined, processed or recycled in North America. This increases each year until 2027 when 80% of the battery’s minerals must be mined, processed, or recycled in North America.

It is unclear how quickly electric vehicle manufacturers can develop supply chains to meet these requirements. The US is heavily dependent on China for lithium-ion battery cells (80%) as well as graphite used for battery electrodes. Electric Vehicle manufacturers that can break this reliance on China will have a competitive advantage over EV manufacturers that are unable to do so.

There are also limits on the cost of the electric vehicles and income limits on taxpayers who can qualify for electric vehicle tax credits. EV cars cannot cost more than $55,000 and SUVs and light trucks cannot cost more than $80,000 and still qualify for the tax credit. Additionally, individuals earning more than $150,000 and couples earning more than $300,000 do not qualify for the EV tax credits.

Used electric vehicles sold by a car dealer also qualify for tax credits of up to $4,000 or 30% of the sales price, whichever is less. The sales price cannot exceed $25,000 and the electric vehicle must be at least two years old. Individuals who purchase a used electric vehicle cannot earn more than $75,000 (joint filers $150,000) a year. These tax credits take effect January 1, 2023.

Note: Last month the Voice had a summary of the energy efficiency incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act. Here, and on the next page, are some details of how the incentives work. These energy efficiency measures are likely to have a beneficial impact on more West Virginians than any other components of the IRA.

Groups Appeal Decision on Mountain Valley Pipeline Extension

The developers of the Mountain Valley Pipeline have requested, and received, an extension from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) of the time limit to complete construction. Several groups and individuals, including the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, objected to the granting of the extension. See the August, 2022, issue of The Highlands Voice for the details. https://www.wvhighlands.org/highlands-voice/2022/08%20August%202022.pdf

In spite of the objections, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission granted the extension. Now the developers have another four years to complete the pipeline. Now the groups have asked that FERC to reconsider its decision.

As a basis for the request, the groups say that FERC did not seriously consider their objections to the extension. Even though they presented significant new information in their objections to the extension, FERC did not thoroughly evaluate that information.

Want to Come to the Fall Review?

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy’s Fall Review is October 14-16. Interesting and fun stuff GUARANTEED. Full schedule on page 3. To register, click here: https://forms.gle/552nW9fcXJd4deBK6
Details on the Energy Efficiency Rebates

There is one revived tax credit program for energy efficiency and two new rebate energy efficiency programs in the IRA.

The tax credit program, now called the Energy Efficiency Home Improvement Credit, had lapsed. It has been revived and made retroactive to 2022, although with only limited benefits: 10% tax credit on qualified efficiency measures with a $500 lifetime cap. Beginning in 2023, the tax credit increases to 30% and the lifetime cap on benefits is replaced with a cap of $600 per measure, and a $1,200 annual cap. Exceptions to these caps are included in the chart below.

Eligible services and home improvements must be highly rated by Energy Star or other rating system, and include:

- Heat pumps and heat pump water heaters ($2,000 credit)
- Insulation and air sealing
- Energy audits ($150 tax credit)
- Energy-efficient HVAC systems (including furnaces, boilers, and central AC)
- Electrical panel upgrades; must be at least 200 amps capacity
- Energy-efficient windows and doors ($500 tax credit for doors)

The second energy efficiency program in the IRA is the HOMES program, and is a more traditional energy efficiency program. It provides rebates for the cost of a project depending on how much energy is saved through the project:

- For retrofits that are projected to save 35% or more of the household’s energy, the rebates are $4,000 or 50% of the project costs, whichever is less. The benefits increase to $8,000 or 80% of the cost of the project whichever is less for households earning less than 80% of the area median income.
- For retrofits that are projected to save between 20% and 35% of the household’s energy, the rebates are $2,000 or 50% of the project costs, whichever is less. The benefits increase to $4,000 or 80% of the cost of the project whichever is less for households earning less than 80% of the area median income.

Benefits from these two energy efficiency programs cannot be combined. Both programs will be run by the state. The state will need to submit a draft program to the US Department of Energy for approval before benefits will be available. It is unclear how soon that will happen.

According to the HUD website, estimates for what 80% and 150% of the median income for West Virginia in 2021 for various household sizes are shown below. Please note that these are 2021 figures and will change. And they represent the best data available and should be considered estimates.

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<th>Household Size</th>
<th>80% of the median income in West Virginia</th>
<th>150% of the median income in West Virginia</th>
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Moderate-income households qualify for 50% of the maximum benefit listed above. For example, a moderate-income family could receive a rebate up to $4,000 for installing a heat pump. Moderate-income households are defined as earning between 80% and 150% of the area median income as defined by HUD (see the chart below). Households earning more than 150% of the median income do not qualify for rebates under this electrification program. Multi-family properties qualify if 50% of the residents meet these income requirements.

Low-income homeowners are defined as households that earn less than 80% of the area median income as determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (see the chart below). Multi-family properties qualify if 50% of the residents meet this income requirement.


2 I have no idea what this language means. But it is verbatim from the IRA statute.
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GET A GREAT HISTORY BOOK

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518 pages, 6x9, color cover, published by Pocahontas Press

To order your copy for $15.95, plus $3.00 shipping, visit the Conservancy’s website, wvhighlands.org, where payment is accepted by credit card and PayPal.

Or write: WVHC, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Proceeds support the Conservancy’s ongoing environmental projects.

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Join Now ! ! !

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

You may also join on-line at www.wvhighlands.org
Mon National Forest Hiking Guide

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, the new edition of the treasured guide to every trail in the Monongahela National Forest features brand-new topographic maps and Kent Mason’s gorgeous photos, all in color.

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

* newly designated wilderness areas
* new trails near campgrounds and sites of special significance
* a new complex of interconnected trails on Cheat Mountain
* rerouted and discontinued trails
* ratings for difficulty, scenery, access to water, and much else

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

The Monongahela National Forest has long been known as a ‘Special Place’. The hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing opportunities it provides are among the best in the eastern U.S. New wilderness and backcountry trails have been added to the outstanding areas we have appreciated for decades – Otter Creek Wilderness, Dolly Sods Wilderness, Flatrock Plains, Roaring Plains, Blackwater Canyon, Spruce Knob, North Fork Mountain, Shaver’s Mountain, Laurel Fork Wilderness, Cranberry Wilderness -- and there are lesser-known gems to be found in between.

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

Send $18.95 plus $3.00 shipping to:
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HATS FOR SALE

We have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy baseball style caps for sale as well as I ♥ Mountains caps.

The WVHC cap is beige with green woven into the twill with a pre-curved visor. The front of the cap has West Virginia Highlands Conservancy logo and the words West Virginia Highlands Conservancy on the front and I (heart) Mountains on the back. It is soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure.

The I ♥ Mountains The colors are stone and red. The front of the cap has I ♥ MOUNTAINS. The heart is red. The red hats are soft twill, unstructured, low profile, sewn eyelets, cloth strap with tri-glide buckle closure. The stone has a stiff front crown with a velcro strap on the back. All hats have West Virginia Highlands Conservancy printed on the back. Cost is $20 by mail. West Virginia residents add 6% tax. Make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Atten: Online Store, P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306
Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Update

By Dave Johnston

The month of September gave us a chance to finish up and assess the results of several projects in the Dolly Sods Wilderness, gear up for the hectic fall leaf season, and begin planning for the future.

Levels of Visitation

The Forest Service first installed registration boxes at the Dolly Sods trailheads along FR 19 and FR 75 in September of 2021. Since then, Wilderness Stewards volunteers have visited the boxes at least once a week to remove filled sheets, replace pencils and keep the registration system in good working order. We scan the sheets and forward them to the Forest Service. We tally the number of parties, number of people, their planned routes, number of planned nights, and zip codes onto a spreadsheet.

We now have a full year of data to give an idea of the current level of visitation to the backcountry areas of Dolly Sods. During that time a total of nearly 6000 separate parties have signed in, with a total of just over 15,000 individuals. The average party size is about 2.5 people. A little more than 50% of the parties are day hikers, with the remainder planning to spend at least one night. For those, the average planned stay was about 1.7 nights per party.

Of course, this represents only those who actually signed in at the registration boxes, and doesn’t include the trailhead off Forest Road 80, from Canaan Valley, which doesn’t have a box. So if we assume a registration rate of 50%, and add in about another 10% for FR 80, the total number of backcountry visitors was probably about 34,000 individuals in about 13,000 parties.

We can’t yet make any observations about any changes in visitation levels from last year, during the pandemic, to this year. We won’t be able to begin to do that until the end of October, the first full month common to both years.

Solitude Monitoring

The summer 2022 solitude monitoring project was completed on schedule at the end of August. As reported in last month’s Voice, following an enhanced protocol allowed us to record the rate of encounters with groups and individuals as a function of time, which gives a better idea of what the experience of a hiker would be like than merely looking at the total encounters. For example, here is a graphical representation of the frequency of encounters with groups, and the number of people in each group, during an approximately four-hour hike on the Big Stonecoal trail on a weekend:

![Graph of encounters by time](image-url)
More about Wilderness Stewards (Continued from previous page)

The hiker never went more than about 30 minutes between encounters, and most were never more than a few minutes apart. In total the hiker encountered 35 groups, an average of 8.5 groups per hour, or about one every seven minutes. The total number of people and dogs was 133, an average of 32.5 per hour.

The results of each of the 30 solitude hikes have been compiled into a spreadsheet and subjected to a preliminary statistical analysis, and all of this forwarded to the Forest Service. We do not plan to another survey this fall, but may do them during both the spring and fall of next year.

Trailhead Stewards

The Trailhead Stewards have continued to greet visitors at the trailheads and serve as a resource for their visit. We have been gearing up for the usual crowds during the peak of the blueberry color season in early and mid-October. Even the “preliminary” last weekend of September presented a challenge for two Stewards to keep up with the hiker traffic at the Bear Rocks trailhead.

The Trailhead Stewards program is our most direct action to address the problems associated with heavy visitor use of the Dolly Sods Wilderness. While everyone, including be most well-intentioned and skilled among us, has an impact, visitation can be sustainable if hikers and campers adhere to Leave No Trace practices and understand the unique requirements of wilderness travel. An increasing number of visitors arrive with good intentions but only a vague idea of how to act in a wilderness.

Our “authority of the resource” methods leverage those good intentions toward active mindfulness of the need to keep the wilderness wild and to minimize the evidence of their presence throughout their visit. No single trailhead contact will reverse the decline of Dolly Sods, but every little bit of consciousness raising, applied to a large number of visitors, contributes to making a difference for the wilderness.

We can always use more Trailhead Stewards, and we think you’ll find it a rewarding experience for yourself as well. See the paragraph at the end of the article for more information and to sign up.

Campsite Surveys

As of this writing (late September) nearly all of the trails in Dolly Sods have been surveyed for campsites. Those found have been measured, photographed, and their conditions and environmental impact assessed. It looks like we are on track to have identified and surveyed about 300 campsites by the end of the month. Follow up surveys will be done to complete the inventory along certain social trails and in off-trail zones of the wilderness. It is likely that a total of around 350 campsites will eventually be located and surveyed.

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.
Birding on Farm View Trail

Our final outing for the summer consisted of a delightful Labor Day Weekend bird walk along one of the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge’s newest routes: Farm View Trail. A partial loop trail that winds through the fields and forests of the old Thompson Farm and meanders along the Blackwater River, there are a few areas on the lower loop where you are surrounded by nature and cannot see a vehicle, house or ski slope. A rare spot indeed for the middle of the Valley! We were lucky to avoid the chances of rain and just have some big clouds and sunshine for our outing.

Although it was not the ideal time of day, some attendees commented that they were glad that the walk was closer to noon and not at six in the morning. While we would have likely seen more migratory birds in the early morning, we still saw plenty of birds on our midday walk. (And if you’re really hankering for that pre-dawn bird walk, there is still hope! Come join our bird walk outing led by WVHC board member Jackie Burns at our Energy-In-WV-themed Annual Fall Review at North Bend State Park at 6AM on Oct. 15.) During this time of year, many migratory birds are making their sojourns south, passing through Appalachia’s mountains and valleys as they seek warmer climes in Mexico and Central/South America.

Our bird walk was led by WV birding expert LeJay Graffious. LeJay has worked with many birding organizations across Appalachia, including Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, Brooks Bird Club, Mountaineer Chapter of National Audubon, and Allegheny Front Migratory Observatory (AFMO) on top of Dolly Sods. He is also the Director of Old Hemlock Foundation in Preston County, WV, a historic property with virgin hemlock trees. By the way, if you have never been to the bird banding station at Allegheny Front Migratory Observatory near Red Creek Campground, you are missing out! While the station did not open this season, they will be back in action in Fall 2023.

The group didn’t make it far out of the Beall Lane parking lot before binoculars were raised and mutterings of the type of species were heard. Farm View Trail offers many stunning views of Canaan Valley and a nice mix of habitat for birds, animals and insects. Some birds prefer the rolling fields or the powerlines. Others were spotted most often careening about in the fruits at the tops of the cherry trees (here’s looking at you, Cedar Waxwings). A couple species were seen soaring high above the valley floor. All in all, the group spotted 22 different species of birds. LeJay helped us spot and identify birds with ease and he took careful notes.

While some birds have flashy colors and are easier to spot, others are not so apparent and took some time to locate, even with the help of others in the group. And while some of the birds that were spotted were viewable by everyone in the group, there were still birds that fit into the rare sighting category. In fact, WVHC’s president, Larry “Hawkeye” Thomas, spotted a rare Nashville Warbler in a thicket near the Thompson’s old quarry. I made up that nickname but Larry does get credit for spotting this unique gold, gray and white songbird. The warbler was likely headed to spend winter in Mexico. I thought about following along but decided against it…no wings, ya know?

We intend to host more bird walks next year and encourage everyone who visits Dolly Sods between August and October to check in from sunrise to about 11 AM at the Allegheny Front Migratory Observatory bird banding station. It is truly a special project and something that kids and adults alike will surely enjoy. As always, we would love to hear feedback from our membership and if you’d like to help lead an outing, please let me know! director@wvhhighlands.org Happy Autumn, everyone. Enjoy the (much easier to see) leaf peeping.

Bird Tally
11 Canada Goose
2 Mourning Dove
2 Ruby-throated Hummingbird
1 Turkey Vulture
1 Cooper’s Hawk
2 Northern Flicker
4 Eastern Phoebe
5 Blue Jay
5 American Crow
1 Common Raven
2 Black-capped Chickadee
2 White-breasted Nuthatch
2 Eastern Bluebird
1 American Robin
52 Cedar Waxwing
5 American Goldfinch
2 Chipping Sparrow
3 Field Sparrow
1 Savannah Sparrow
3 Song Sparrow
1 Nashville Warbler
5 Common Yellowthroat
Connecting the Wild: A Bridge to the Wilderness

By Randy Kessling

In a letter of August 20, 2022, Shane Jones, Ecosystems Staff Officer for the US Forest Service, asked the Highlands Conservancy if it would support its proposed acquisition of the Callen parcel, a 450 +/- acre parcel of land (the parcel) which is bounded on its West by the Laurel Fork South Wilderness in the vicinity of the Laurel Fork’s Elk Run tributary in Randolph County, and on the East, by Cunningham Knob, a separate Forest Service holding. The parcel, and indeed most of its considerable surrounding private lands have been, and continue to be, used for open grazing of cattle. Consequently, there is relatively little to no forest cover on much of this land.

We asked Mr. Jones to elaborate in response to several questions that were posed by our Board members, in an effort to better understand what is being proposed. The following few paragraphs lay out a general description of the proposed management activities that the Forest Service plans to take if the transfer of ownership of the parcel is successful.

With the parcel’s history of grazing and the limitation imposed by the underlying geology (unproductive sandstone (Pocono) geology), it is likely that grazing would continue under Forest Service management. Red spruce would be planted on the parcel with the intent of connecting the existing red spruce stands in the Wilderness areas with those on Cunningham Knob. Part of the tree planting would likely involve “silvopasture” in which grazing and forestry practice are integrated. It is not certain at this time what management prescription would apply to the parcel, but Management Prescription 4.1 is thought to be the most likely prescription since Cunningham Knob is MP 4.1.

A major potential benefit of this acquisition is that it would allow the Forest Service to perform stream restoration work on the headwaters of Elk Run. A good portion of Elk Run flows through the parcel on its way into the Wilderness and on through to Laurel Fork. Due to the grazing use of the land, there is currently little to no riparian buffer surrounding Elk Run. The stream restoration work could provide a riparian stream buffer which may improve the water quality in the stream by lowering water temperatures, reducing stream sedimentation and improving stream habitat.

There would be public access to the area, primarily for foot travel. The parcel would provide access for travel between the Laurel Fork South Wilderness and Cunningham knob.

With only a week to consider the Forest Service’s request for our support, the Conservancy concluded that even with some unknowns as to how the management of the parcel might unfold, the transfer of ownership of the parcel to the Forest Service would give the public a voice in the management of the parcel that it would not otherwise have.

On August 24, 2022, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy sent a letter to the Forest Supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest stating the Conservancy’s support for the acquisition of the parcel. The letter enumerates the ways in which the proposed parcel acquisition and future management are consistent with the purposes of the Highlands Conservancy. The letter further emphasizes the history of successful collaboration between the Conservancy and the Forest Service and expresses a wish for success in the Forest Service’s effort to “acquire the property for the people of the United States”.

On a personal note, I hiked the area along the Wilderness boundary that defines the western edge of the Callen parcel a number of years ago. With its expansive open views and its comforting promise of solitude, it remains in my memory a remarkable place.

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 Cristyn 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.
The baby shirts are certified organic cotton and are offered in one infant and several toddler sizes and an infant onesie. Slogan is “I ♥ Mountains Save One for Me!” Onesie [18 mo.]---$25, Infant tee [18 mo.]---$20, Toddler tee, 2T, 3T, 4T, 5/6---$20

Soft pima cotton adult polo shirts are a handsome earhtone light brown and feature the spruce tree logo. Sizes M-XL [Shirts run large for stated size.] $ 25.00, 2XL $26.50

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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.