

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
PO. Box 306
Charleston, WV 25321

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit No. 80004
Elkins, WV



The Highlands Voice

Since 1967, The Monthly Publication of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Volume 55 No. 11 November, 2022

Cutting the Trees to Save the Forest

By Olivia Miller

A project proposed by the United States Forest Service to clear cut 3,458 acres of older-growth forest stands in sections of the Monongahela National Forest in Tucker and Preston Counties, referred to as the Upper Cheat River Project, has raised concerns with citizens of the local community and West Virginia conservation groups in recent months.

The 86,138-acre project area is a biodiversity hotspot with 148 miles of native Brook Trout streams, several endangered bat species, including the Northern Long-Eared Bat, Virginia Big-eared Bat and the Indiana Bat, as well as the WV Northern Flying Squirrel and Hellbender—all of which are iconic to WV and some of which are federally protected. To date, the Forest

Service has already clear cut 2,206 acres within the project area. The additional acreage will encompass 2,442 acres of trees over 100 years old and 782 acres of trees over 120 years old.

According to US Forest Service documents, the purpose of the proposed Upper Cheat River Project is to improve forest health and age class diversity, improve wildlife and fish habitat, restore soils and riparian corridors, and provide a network of sustainable roads. The project proposal includes a variety of management activities to achieve the goals, objectives and desired future conditions of the 2006 Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

(More on p. 3)

What's inside:

Thoughts from our president	2	Officers	10	Board highlights	18
Another milestone	3	Get a Hiking Guide	11	Fun and an opportunity	
Comings and goings	4	Dolly Sods news	12	coming up	19
Legislative plans	5	Value of trees	14	Get stuff	20
Corridor H	6	How to join	16		
New member	7	Get a History Book	16		
Fall review summary	8	An opinion on logging	17		

Visit us on the web at www.wvhighlands.org Find us on Facebook

Thoughts from our President

By Larry Thomas

October, just like every other month was once again very busy at the Conservancy as it was for all of the organizations within the environmental community. For the Conservancy, among other activities, it was another wonderful Annual Fall Review. This year once again was packed full of presentations and activities starting with the in person meet and greet on Friday evening Oct. 14, great presentations on Saturday and continued by the Annual Membership meeting and the Quarterly Board of Directors meeting on Sunday at North Bend State Park in Cairo, West Virginia.

It was our first in-person meeting since the start of Covid so long ago. It was great to see everyone in person once again. The weather was cooperative, and Mother Nature provided a spectacular show of fall foliage for the trip to and from the meeting. See the article concerning the Fall Review in this issue of *The Highlands Voice*.

Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards

WVHC is again very pleased with the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards program as we are again in the very busy fall season, where visitation to our highlands has skyrocketed and the already overcrowding at Dolly Sods. I want to personally thank all of the volunteers who have volunteered their time at the trailheads and for participating in the solitude monitoring surveys and campsite inventories. See the article in this month's Highlands Voice for an update of the project.

Bats in West Virginia

Information published by the WV Extension Service

Bats are a highly specialized group of mammals that are often misunderstood. There are over 1,300 bat species worldwide and at least 14 species in WV. WV bats range in size from the eastern small-footed myotis (4.5 grams) to the hoary bat (27.5 grams), with the average size of a bat in WV being about 10 grams.

All 14 species of bats found in WV feed on insects. They are voracious eaters, consuming 50 to 75 percent of their body weight in insects each night.

A primary predator of nocturnal insects, bats can suppress populations of forest and agricultural pests. While one bat consuming between 5 and 7.5 grams of insects a night may not sound like much, consider that there may be 100,000 bats on the local landscape. The amount of insects consumed each night jumps to between 1,100 and 1,650 pounds.

Currently, several bat species are facing significant population declines from an introduced disease called white-nose syndrome.

White-nose syndrome is caused by a fungus and impacts hibernating bats. In some hibernacula, hibernating bats have experienced 90 to 100 percent mortality. It is estimated that we have lost over 5.7 million bats in the eastern U.S. Not only are we losing

these iconic species from the landscape, but we are also losing their suppression of our insects.

White-nose syndrome has been documented in WV, and we are seeing the impacts of this disease in our bat populations.

West Virginians can help combat this population decline by:

- Promoting bat conservation by understanding the ecological services that our bats provide and educating landowners of their importance.
- Finding caves or mines where bats may be hibernating during the winter months. If you enter those caves or mines outside of the hibernation period, be sure to decontaminate your clothing or gear before you enter another cave to help stop the spread of the white-nose fungus.
- Constructing bat houses to provide daytime roosting sites.

See the entire article by [Sheldon Owen](#), WVU Extension Wildlife Specialist at extension.wvu.edu/natural-resources/wildlife/bats.

Senator Manchin's Proposed Energy Permitting Provisions

Senator Joe Manchin pulled his contentious amendment to speed up energy project permitting from a stopgap spending bill, bowing to the inevitable after opposition from both parties.

Manchin's proposal received pushback from Republicans and many Democrats who saw it as a giveaway to the Mountain Valley Pipeline developers that would excessively weaken environmental review processes protecting communities most venerable to polluting energy projects.

Environmentalists cheered the news that Manchin's proposal had been dropped from the spending bill. They saw that the proposal would have weakened critical environmental protections and rubber stamped the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

I would like to thank the Highlands Conservancy members, the Fall Review Committee, the program director, and the Board of Director members for taking their time to plan and participate in the 2022 Fall Review and am looking forward to a very productive 2023 and would like to close with this that I found several years ago by A. G. Huger.

"No fairer land surely is this, where the hills are feathered with forest and braided with the rills! The mountains that over these green valley's rise, ever woo'd by the winds, ever kissed by the skies; and the homes and hearts that they shall hold. Gifts sweeter than glory and richer than gold."

Enjoy *The Highlands Voice* as we report on issues in or affecting the Highlands that we are endeavoring to protect for future generations and please stay safe as we start the holiday season.

Cutting the Trees to Save the Forest

(Continued from p. 1)

However, comments received by the Forest Service during the project scoping and environmental assessment review process raised questions about the ability of the proposed actions to achieve the stated purpose.

The Forest Service's environmental assessment also revealed that the net revenue for the government under the proposed project is a loss of 1.4 million dollars.

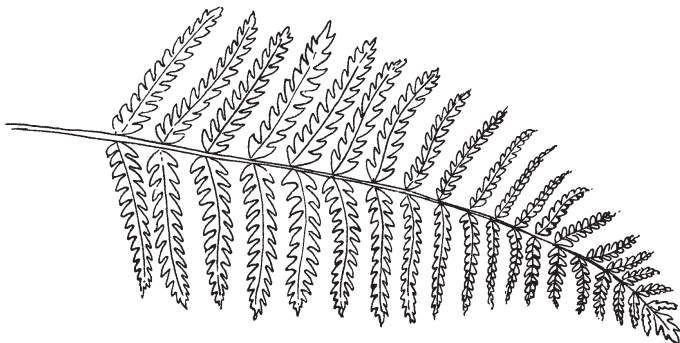
On Sept. 16 a group of 48 people living within the project area known as the Horseshoe Community filed an objection letter with the Forest Service, citing concerns over increased flooding in the project area in recent years, impacts of herbicides on drinking water, uncontrolled invasive species spreading from Forest Service lands, fire hazards, protection of heritage trees and wasting of timber resources. The Friends of Blackwater also filed an objection.

The WV Highlands Conservancy, Friends of the Cheat, Friends of Blackwater and Center for Biological Diversity, The Nature Conservancy, and the Horseshoe Community all provided comments during the public comment period. Within the letters, WV conservation groups raised concerns over threats to rare and endangered species, loss of carbon storage in standing timber, above and below ground, and amount of carbon emissions during harvest.

Within the comments supplied to the Forest Service by the WV Highlands Conservancy, the Public Lands Committee urged the Forest Service to reconsider proposed harvests of stands over 120 years old, as old forests constitute important reservoirs of stored carbon that are critical for mitigating the ongoing acceleration of climate change.

A Facebook group following the progress of the project, Speak For The Trees Too, was created in April 2022 and has 176 followers, and an online petition opposing the project currently has 400 signatures.

Friends of Blackwater, the Sierra Club and others have organized a rally scheduled for Monday, Nov. 14 at 1 p.m. outside of the Forest Service Building in Elkins to oppose the project.



Another Milestone

November, 2020, represents another milestone: Bob Marshall has served as the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Treasurer for twenty years. Congratulations and a big thank you!

The November, 2002, issue of *The Highlands Voice* reported that "Bob Marshall has volunteered (more or less) to serve as treasurer." The "more or less" part is that it took some arm twisting by President Frank Young to convince Bob of the merits of service. By 2004 his arm had largely healed and now only hurts when it is about to rain.

Here's to more good years of treasurering!

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.

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.

Comings and Goings

Goodbye from John

As many of you already know, this will be my last issue as editor of *The Highlands Voice*. This month our new editor, Olivia Miller, and I are doing it together. Next month she will be ready to solo.

Solo, of course, only refers to the editing part. The *Voice* has always been a collaborative effort between me and the members. I appreciate all those who have submitted stories over the years, stories without which the *Voice* could never exist. I trust you will continue to cooperate with Olivia as you have with me.

There was no particular reason I chose to leave. I have been editor for twenty years, a good long run. I wanted to go out like Sandy Koufax (one last obscure cultural reference for the road). I didn't want to wait until I was tired of editing, wait until the *Voice* started to feel like a burden.

It has been a privilege to edit the *Voice*. I like to write; I like to encourage other people to write. The *Voice* has given me an unparalleled opportunity to do both. I appreciate that opportunity.

Although I did not plan it this way, my leaving has created an opportunity for the Conservancy. For the first fifty years of our existence, the *Voice* was the only way we communicated with our members. It was the primary way we communicated with the world at large; it was in every public library in the state and on the desk (or in the trash can) of our elected representatives.

That's not the world we live in today. Even though many of us now, and always will, get their news from newspapers, much information is moving on line. In the recent past the Conservancy has begun easing into that world. Olivia has the skills to take us fully into that world. Although there will always be a *Voice*, it will no longer be the only way we communicate with our members or the public.

Even though I will no longer be editor of the *Voice*, my involvement with the Conservancy will not end. I remain Secretary. Even though relief from the editing duties will give me more time to enjoy the psithurism, I also hope to contribute stories for Olivia to edit and include in future *Voices*.

As editor, however, this is it. Writing and editing has been a joy and I am glad I did it but everything has to end sometime. So long.

Hello from Olivia

Hello members and friends of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. I am Olivia Miller, the new communications director and editor of *The Highlands Voice*.

My roots run deep in the Mountain State—ancestors from both sides of my family settled in what we now know as Tucker County, West Virginia, in the late 1700s. I was raised along the Cheat River in the small town of Hendricks, just minutes away from Otter Creek Wilderness Area.

It is in the Monongahela National Forest that I developed a deep connection to and appreciation for nature. In many ways, my life so far in WV has given me everything I cherish most deeply: family, friends, community, kindness, tradition, resilience and abundant mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, and streams. I am whole-heartedly committed to protecting and preserving the bountiful natural beauty of the Mountain State for generations to come.

I received my Bachelor of Science in journalism with a minor in women's and gender studies from West Virginia University in 2018. Following graduation, I began working in higher education marketing and communications at WVU's Eberly College of Arts and Sciences and later for the Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources, reporting on novel research spanning the Earth and life sciences. I continue to work as a freelance writer, independent social media and marketing consultant and yoga teacher.

Early in my undergraduate career at WVU, I became involved in activism and spent endless hours phone banking and going door-to-door canvassing for local candidates and raising awareness on various political issues. I am a firm believer in the power of collective action and feel that we all have a critical role to play in the conservation of the environment and health of our communities.

I am honored to be joining an organization with such a rich, long-standing history and notable reputation of environmental conservation work in WV. It is true, *The Highlands Voice* has been in circulation since before I was born, and I am mindful that I have very big shoes to fill in this role. With guidance from the board, the previous *Voice* editor, John McFerrin, staff of the Conservancy, and support from our members, I am confident that this new season of change will prove to be fruitful for the organization.

In addition to serving as editor of the *Voice*, I will be elevating the mission of the Conservancy online. I invite you to join us in our mission on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

I am very excited about the future of the Conservancy. Please spread the word about the organization and our mission with your family and friends. We have work to do!

The Conservancy's 2023 Legislative Priorities



LEGISLATURE 2023

The WVHC Legislative Committee will closely follow all bills as they are introduced in the January 2023 regular legislative session to understand their impact on West Virginia public lands. The session will kick off the second week of January and will continue for 60 days. In a typical year there will be thousands of bills introduced and sifting through them for public land implications is critical. In previous years, bills have been introduced focusing on Off-Road Vehicle use, changes to State Parks, timbering and other relevant issues.

As we approach the legislative session at the start of the new year, the Conservancy will be reporting on each of the following priorities in greater detail.

Community Solar

Community solar is an idea that continues to gain traction across the country. It refers to locally installed solar facilities that are shared by multiple community subscribers. This provides equal access to the economic and environmental benefits of solar energy, regardless of the physical attributes of a home, or home ownership. In 2022, House Bill 4561, 'Establishing a community solar program for subscribers to gain credits against their utility bills,' was introduced by Delegates Hansen and Young to start the discussion on community solar in WV. It faces an uphill battle against the entrenched coal-based power industry, and the coal-focused Public Service Commission.

Orphaned Well Prevention

There are estimated to be over 6,500 orphaned wells across the state of WV. These wells were left behind by the oil and gas industry, leaving taxpayers responsible for the costs to plug them. On average, plugging a single well costs a whopping \$55K. These orphaned wells pose a major threat to landowners' property rights, to the environment and to the communities in which they are located. These wells continue to leak methane gas and toxic liquids, polluting the air and water. In 2022, House Bill 4054, 'Orphan Oil and Gas Well Prevention Act,' was introduced by Delegates Hansen and Young to require new well operators to set up an escrow fund to cover the costs of eventual plugging of the well. This bill faces enormous push-back from the oil and gas industry.

Above Ground Storage Tanks

Bills to relax standards of above ground storage tanks have been introduced in the past two years. In 2022, House Bill 2598, 'Modifying the inspection requirements and the definition of an above ground storage tank,' was introduced by Delegate Kelly with broad

support. This version would have relaxed inspection requirements on oil and gas tanks located within zones of critical concern, which are five hours or less upstream of drinking water intakes. The tanks are used by the oil and gas industry to catch and store fluids used in drilling and production. The fluid is composed of a range of hydrocarbons and a brine that contains a mixture of toxic materials. Kelly's bill would have gotten rid of the requirement that a certified professional engineer inspect and certify tanks and would have changed

the requirement of secondary containment inspections from 14 days to 30. With strong public opposition, the bill has been defeated, but is expected to arise again in 2023. It is strongly supported by the oil and gas industry.

Safe Drinking Water/PFAS

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of man-made chemicals that do not exist naturally in the environment; about 600 are used in the United States. They are considered forever chemicals because they do not break down under natural environmental conditions. PFAS have been used in consumer product manufacturing since the 1950's for their non-stick and water-resistant properties. In July 2022, WV released a study of PFAS in the state's pre-treated source water. The state tested water supplies for up to 28 types of PFAS and at least one type of PFAS was detected at 67 locations. For more information, visit wvivers.org/pfas

In 2022, House Bill 4055, 'Clean Drinking Water Act,' was introduced by Delegates Hansen, Doyle and Young. The bill would compel the state to deal with this pervasive threat - propose maximum contaminant levels or treatment techniques for certain PFAS pollutants; create the West Virginia PFAS Action Response Team; require reports from facilities using certain PFAS chemicals; propose updates to human health criteria; and to promulgate legislative rules.

Corridor H: What the Engineers Don't See

By Hugh Rogers

When our reports on the Corridor H highway project began appearing as a bimonthly feature, perhaps inevitably they became more technical, more insider baseball.

So for the September inning, manager-editor John McFerrin sent himself to the plate. With “Corridor H for Dummies,” he gave readers history and context for the current dispute.

Why did we take on this fight in the first place? John quoted David Elkinton’s book on the first forty years of the Highlands Conservancy. He wrote that from the beginning, we “questioned the basic need” for a four-lane highway on new location tearing through the highlands. Damage was inevitable. And so it has been.

You can see the damage happening right now, as construction continues (five years and counting) on the Kerens-to-Parsons section. From your car, it’s visible along US 219 south of, and WV 72 just north of Parsons.

In late October I hiked with friends on the South Haddix Trail, now interrupted by the highway. A tributary of South Haddix Run had been dammed by the road. Below, we could see a series of sediment catchment ponds, obviously filled with the grit that blankets the stream bottom that ruins the habitat for fish. Every time it rains, South Haddix becomes Mud Run. Another rare trout stream abolished.

From a high point above the run, looking east along the huge cut we could see the triple pier of the bridge designed to cross Haddix Run and US 219. The assembly has been slipping downhill. Whom to blame for the blunder is the subject of litigation between the contractor, Kokosing, and the Division of Highways (WVDOH). Meanwhile, attempted remediation continues. Another bridge-building blunder closer to Elkins wasn’t discovered until the highway had been open for several years. It’s being fixed—we hope—during a two-year detour.

WVDOH considers such mistakes exceptional. Damage to the environment, though, is taken for granted, handled with paltry fines and paper promises to do better. We saw it along Beaver Creek as the highway extended toward Davis; now we see it on formerly-pristine streams in the National Forest; soon we’re likely to see it on the main stem of the Cheat. As with mines and pipelines, so with highways: the toll shows up in the water. Later, we measure the loss of forest, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and more.

All this was foreseen, as Dave Elkinton wrote, fifty years ago. And sued over, twenty-five years after that. Now, after a settlement agreement following our partial victory in the federal court of appeals, our position is somewhat different.

Although Transportation Secretary Jimmy Wriston told legislative committees in Charleston and Washington that we are just a little pack of enviros who want to delay the project *again*, we

find ourselves in company with a large majority of businesses in both Thomas and Davis who want a better route that would serve both towns and protect the Blackwater River area. As members of the Tucker County Chamber of Commerce, they participated in a survey on prospective routes for Corridor H. Respondents favored the northern route over the WVDOH alignment, three to one.

Our allies don’t want any more delay. They know, however, that the Parsons-to-Davis section comes last, in part, because it’s the most difficult section to build.

WVDOH’s contractors have been busy since 2000 building from east to west, five sections from Wardensville to Baker, to Moorefield, to Forman, to Bismarck, to Davis, and then picking up where they had left off north of Elkins. Now, they’re counting down to the end. Let us get ‘er done, they say, or the money will go away. The town councils have shied away from seeking any changes.

At a show-and-tell in September, WVDOH and Federal Highway Administration officials conceded that funding will be there, “available until obligated.” Still, Davis Mayor Al Tomson says he’d rather have “the bird in the hand.”

But how much more time would it take to do it right? According to the Briefing Statement agreed on by the parties to the Settlement Agreement, “If a prudent and feasible alternative route were found, the new route would have to be developed. Estimated time for the various studies is 18 months.” That estimate was made before the EIS process was streamlined. Compare it with the lifespan of a bad alignment—well into the next century.

At the presentation on September 12, WVDOH showed a new plan for their Truck Route, an add-on to cope with the failure of their preferred alignment to do anything about truck traffic through Thomas. If you’ve ever been there, you’ll know the problems with safety, noise, and wear-and-tear.

Now the engineers propose to designate the two-lane Truck Route as WV 32—the main street through Thomas would become Business 32. They hope the bypass will attract vehicles traveling to or from Pittsburgh/Cumberland/Oakland. In this scheme, Thomas traffic will have to turn across oncoming vehicles to get on or off 32. One safety problem would be solved by creating two more. And all the trucks that take the bypass would still have to use 32 between the towns in order to reach Corridor H.

Wrestling with this issue, the highway planners have shown the feasibility and relative advantages of the northern route. Their bypass would go halfway, intersecting US 219 north of Thomas.

(More on the next page)

Partners Make Progress

By Sarah Hinnant

This October, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy welcomed Friends of the Cheat (FOC) board member Sarah Hinnant as a delegate to the WVHC board. Hinnant has served as an active member on FOC's board for six years. As a Preston and Tucker County local, her appointment serves as a bridge between the two organizations. Hinnant focuses her energy on environmental activism and recreation. She also works as a pediatric nurse anesthesiologist at WVU Medicine.

Since the formation of Friends of the Cheat in 1994, the organization's primary focus has been addressing the severe acid mine drainage pollution issues in the lower reaches of the Cheat River watershed. Through coalition building, collaboration, and the implementation of acid mine drainage treatment systems, the Cheat River—named one of the country's most endangered rivers in 1995—is once again alive with life. FOC works with state and federal agencies to coordinate reclamation and remediation efforts, academic institutions to facilitate research projects, and a variety of other stakeholders from the business and non-profit sector.

Collaboration between West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Friends of the Cheat has occurred for years, but with the dissolution of the Shavers Creek Coalition, organizational support from FOC was sought by WVHC.

Hinnant became an active board member by unanimous vote on Oct. 16 at the WVHC quarterly board meeting following the Conservancy's annual Fall Review. Hinnant wasted no time acting as a two-way street between the organizations. She provided ideas

for grant opportunities and membership campaigns to WVHC and portfolio development and membership outings to Friends of the Cheat.

"The WVHC Fall Review keynote speaker Professor James Van Nostrand educated me on our states poor Public Service Commission and strategies citizens can take to improve energy efficiency," said Hinnant. "After the Fall Review, I am looking forward to installing a solar system that can service both our farm and sell extra energy back to the grid. Energy awareness benefits all consumers by keeping costs low while supporting environmentally friendly, reusable energy."

WVHC and FOC, as well as the WV Rivers Coalition, are currently working to train volunteers to gather baseline data for streams that may be impacted by the development of Corridor H. Future collaboration will involve projects that restore, promote and protect the Cheat River watershed.



Corridor H Rolls On (Continued from previous page)

Completing the bypass as the Corridor, connecting it on the east with the completed section near Davis, and on the west with US 219 near Benbush, would separate local and tourist traffic from long-distance trucks.

WVDOH's justifications for the highway begin with this statement of "Purpose and Need": "To improve east-west transportation, to promote economic development in the region, and to preserve or improve quality of life."

In the drive to get 'er done, they are focused on point one, ignoring the equally important points two and three. They claim that completion of the Kerens-to-Parsons section with the bridge over the Cheat River will immediately escalate east-west traffic. More wrecks! More trucks! No time to reconsider an alternative they dismissed (even though it had fewer environmental impacts) fifteen years ago.

They don't look at the *actual* economy that has developed in that period. The number of businesses in Davis and Thomas has doubled. The attractions, tangible and intangible, that those businesses depend on would be undermined by a destructive highway project. So would the quality of life for residents, visitors, and the visitors who become residents.

We conceded years ago that the Corridor would be built in some form. What a shame if it turned out to be as bad as we feared.

2022 Fall Review Recap: Empowering West Virginia

By Olivia Miller and John Mcferrin

Members of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy gathered at the newly renovated North Bend State Park lodge in Cairo, WV, for the first in-person Fall Review since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of us, it was the first time visiting the park. The lodge was quaint and homey, tucked into a hardwood forest with views of golden and bright red leaves all around.

This year's Fall Review was centralized around the theme of energy. Saturday was packed full of presenters with a wide range of expertise in alternative energy. It is no question that an overhaul of our current energy grid is inevitable in the United States, but how we get there exactly is complex and often confusing. Phrases and ideas like a just energy transition, carbon capture and sequestration, green, blue and grey hydrogen, and small modular nuclear reactors get tossed around a lot, but what do they mean? What are their challenges, benefits, drawback, and consequences? Are they viable? Can they merge with our current infrastructure and laws? Do we as consumers get a choice in what powers our homes? We were ready to find out.

Bright and early on Saturday morning, we hit the ground running with a presentation by Stephen Boyers of Solar Holler. With a coffee in one hand, a notebook and pen in the other and an open mind full of optimism and eagerness to learn, we were ready to dive into the emerging world of alternative energy and how it could reshape the Mountain State.

Headquartered in Shepardstown, Solar Holler prides themselves as an 'Appalachian company for Appalachians' and aims to make solar power affordable and accessible. Historically, solar power has been viewed as too expensive, unattainable, and too complicated to install on the average home, Solar Holler is here to tell you that

that is no longer the reality.

Solar Holler has installed more than 1,000 solar panel units for residential homes and commercial businesses since their founding in 2014. Their systems are 100% American made, with the panels themselves being produced in Georgia. The company is a for-benefit solar energy corporation, meaning they balance making a profit while simultaneously addressing social, economical and environmental needs of their service area. Above all, they are committed to bringing clean energy to the Mountain State and will single-handedly do all the heavy lifting for you. If you are wondering whether solar will work for you and the location of your home, Solar Holler offers a free assessment and follow-up consultations at their website sollarholler.com

Following Solar Holler we switched gears with a buzz-worthy presentation by Paul Ziemkiewicz, director of the WV Water Research Institute at West Virginia University, on recovering rare earth elements from acid mine drainage in WV watersheds. The process is convoluted, so let me break it down. More than a century's worth of acid mine drainage has seeped its way into our waterways and is the single biggest detriment to the health of our rivers and streams.

Scientists now know that acid mine drainage contains a valuable combination of elements called rare earths. These materials are used to manufacture the devices that power our modern lives. Rare earths are used in rechargeable batteries for electric and hybrid cars, solar panels, wind turbines, superconductors, our cellphones, and much more. Historically, China has dominated the rare earth industry and the United States is desperate for a domestic supply.

For better or for worse, WV has a great deal of acid mine drainage to treat.

The state's waterways are still being contaminated by mines decommissioned long ago, and likely will be for decades to come. The WV Water Research Institute has developed a new method to reform the acid mine drainage treatment process to extract rare earths.

A pilot plant is currently under construction at Mt. Storm and the first batch of pre-concentrate rare earths was produced at the plant on Sept. 28, 2022. The going rate for preconcentrate ranges between \$150/ton to \$850/ton. Ziemkiewicz hopes this new technology and added potential to make a buck off toxic waste will incentivize coal companies to treat acid mine drainage.

Eriks Bolis of the WV Nature Conservancy brought us back around to the possibilities of solar energy with a hopeful presentation on the emerging opportunity for WV to transform its many abandoned coal fields to solar fields.

In 2019, the Nature Conservancy purchased 253,000 acres of forest in the Central Appalachian Mountains that it calls the Cumberland Forest Project—which encompasses six former mine sites. The Nature Conservancy has identified the Appalachians as one of the most important places on Earth to carry out conservation work due to the regions projected climate resilience, strong biodiversity and carbon dense forests.

To bring the former surface coal mines back into use, the WV Nature Conservancy has developed a holistic plan that will include employment for former mine workers and creates workforce education opportunities for local youth and adults alike. The existing roads, flat, cleared land and expertise of heavy equipment opportunities provide a prime opportunity for renewed use of the denuded land.

(Not finished yet; go to the next page)

More about the Fall Review (continued from previous page)

The Nature Conservancy is also exploring the possibility of creating habitats for pollinators underneath the solar panels and establishing public trail systems on the land for members of the community. If successful, the Nature Conservancy hopes to work with private landowners on expanded reforestation efforts on the sites.

We broke midday for a much-needed dose of fresh air and leg stretch to tour a friend of the Conservancy's home who had recently installed solar panels on their property. We packed into a few vehicles and made our way to Jay Williams and Cindy Burkhart's home to view their ground solar unit up close and personal. We congregated around the big, shiny blue panels on the edge of the property as our new friend, Jay, explained how they worked. They kindly allowed us into their home to have a look at the four large batteries supplying power to the house. A live view of the system showing usage rates, battery life, and electricity credits could all be tracked from an app.

Later, we reconvened back at the lodge's conference room for a Zoom presentation by Jessica Lovering of the Good Energy Collective on the potential to retrofit coal-fired power plants to small nuclear power plants. While this may be possible elsewhere in the country, Lovering cited a study that suggested WV coal plants would not meet the criteria for nuclear plants due to the state's steep-sloping terrain.

For some time, nuclear power has seemed to be a thing of the past, with many countries phasing out their reactors. Events like the Russian-Ukrainian war have prompted countries around the world to restart or build new reactors.

Lovering made the case for a new kind of nuclear power, that is 'not your parent's nuclear.' Most common beliefs around existing nuclear power are that it is dirty, slow, unsafe, expensive and unnecessary, but engineers are working to commercialize

new nuclear technologies and business models to address these issues. She also made the case for a just transition—making sure that fossil fuel workers have real opportunities to find high-quality, well-paid work in new energy jobs.

To date, there has not been a coal-fired power plant that this vision has been carried out on, and research and development is still in its early phases.

Jocelyn Phares, Environmental Resources Analyst at the WV Division of Natural Resources, talked about how the DNR is working to conserve wildlife on pipeline infrastructure. Phares acknowledged that all large linear projects may have adverse impacts to natural resources, and those impacts can be anticipated based on a variety of factors.

The Division of Natural Resources has struck up a unique voluntary agreement with Mountain Valley Pipeline. The agreement is not at the whim of the state legislature's spending priorities, but is instead managed by a third-party fiduciary, The Conservation Fund, to meet restoration efforts. Thanks to this agreement, the Division of Natural Resources will be able to purchase large tracts of interior forests to protect for the citizens of WV.

She also talked about a new process to enable Right of Ways to be pollinator friendly spaces. The process will be applicable for all infrastructure projects—highways, pipelines, electric lines, and solar and wind farms.

Next we had a discussion from Sean O'Leary, senior researcher at the Ohio River Valley Institute, and Andrew Place, Director of United States Energy and Climate Policy at the Clean Air Task Force, on what is called "blue hydrogen" as a potential source of hydrogen for fuel.

There is no dispute that hydrogen would be useful as a fuel. Using it produces no exhaust other than water vapor. It

contains a great deal of energy and would have a wide variety of applications.

The difficulty is that hydrogen is not accessible in nature as a stand-alone element. It is most commonly either bound up with hydrogen to make water or bound up with carbon and oxygen to make natural gas. Blue hydrogen is the process of taking natural gas and extracting the hydrogen from it.

The difficulty with extracting hydrogen from natural gas is that the process of extracting one ton of hydrogen produces 10.5 tons of carbon dioxide. While it would be possible to collect the hydrogen for use and release the carbon dioxide (a process called grey hydrogen) that conflicts with goals of reducing emissions of carbon dioxide as a way to avoid climate change. Instead, blue hydrogen seeks to capture the carbon dioxide and either find another use for it or pump it deep underground where it will remain, never being released to the atmosphere.

The panelists disagreed on the usefulness of this blue hydrogen process. Mr. O'Leary thought that blue hydrogen would be too expensive, requiring an enormous expense both in the equipment to extract the hydrogen and in the pipelines that would be necessary to carry it to where it would be used or stored. He also attacked one of the assumptions in arguments in favor of blue hydrogen. Proponents of blue hydrogen assume that the natural gas industry is an economic benefit to areas where that industry exists. Mr. O'Leary presented statistics tending to show that this was not true.

Mr. Place, on the other hand, supported blue hydrogen. His assumption is that the problem of climate change is so enormous that we have to do whatever we can. That includes developing the

(Still not finished; go to p. 19)

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.)



Roster of Officers, Board Members and Committee Chairs

PRESIDENT: Larry Thomas, P.O. Box 194, Circleville, WV 26804, (304) 567-2602,
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT: Marilyn Shoenfeld, 167 Balsam Way, Davis, WV 26260, (304) 866-3484
VICE PRESIDENT FOR STATE AFFAIRS: Vacant
SECRETARY: John McFerrin, 202 Van Tassel Court, Morgantown, WV 26508, (304) 291-8305,
TREASURER: Bob Marshall, 2108 Emma Road, Kenna, WV 25248, (304) 545-6817,
PAST PRESIDENT: Cynthia D. Ellis, 3114 Steel Ridge Road, Red House, WV 25168, (304) 586-4135,

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2024)

Jackie Burns 304 866 4093
Randy Kesling, 116 Farm Meadow Drive, Bridgeport, WV 26330; (304) 622-5982;
Patrica Gundrum, Charleston, WV
Luanne McGovern, 858 Alta Road, Charleston WV 25314, (973) 873-3369
Buff Rodman, 32 Crystal Drive, Oakmont, PA 15139, (412) 828-8983,

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE (Terms expire October 2023)

George Hack; 510 HANNA RD; Bel Air, MD 21014; 443 742-0463
Rick Webb, 481 Ravens Run Road, Monterey, VA 24465, (540) 468-2881,
Hugh Rogers, 531 Moon Run, Kerens, WV 26276, (304) 636-2662,
Susan Rogers Rosenblum, 135 Fern Lane, Davis, WV 26260, (412) 759-9234

DIRECTOR EMERITUS: George E. Beetham Jr., 2819 Mt. Carmel Avenue, Glenside, PA 19038, (267) 252-3748

ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTORS

WEST VIRGINIA CAVE CONSERVANCY: Randy Rumer; 295 Caraway Lane
Renick, WV 24966; (304) 497-2657;
BROOKS BIRD CLUB: Cynthia D. Ellis, 3114 Steel Ridge Road, Red House, WV 25168, (304) 586-4135,
WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION Dave Ruediger
MOUNTAINEER CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED Randy Kesling, 116 Farm Meadow Drive,
Bridgeport, WV 26330; (304) 622-5982;
FRIENDS OF THE LITTLE KANAWHA: Cindy Rank, 4401 Eden Road, Rock Cave, WV 26234,
(304) 924-5802,
ALLEGHENY HIGHLANDS ALLIANCE: Vacant
FRIENDS OF THE CHEAT: Sarah Hinnant

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE: Cindy Rank, 4401 Eden Road, Rock Cave, WV 26234,
(304) 924-5802
PUBLIC LANDS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE: Vacant
RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMITTEE: Larry Thomas, P.O. Box 194, Circleville, WV 26804, (304) 567-2602,
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Luanne McGovern, 858 Alta Road, Charleston WV 25314, (973) 873-3369
ENDOWMENT FUND COMMITTEE: Larry Thomas, P.O. Box 194, Circleville, WV 26804, (304) 567-2602,
RIVERS COMMITTEE: Susan Rogers Rosenblum, 135 Fern Lane, Davis, WV 26260, (412) 759-9234
HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: Hugh Rogers, 531 Moon Run Road, Kerens, WV 26276, (304) 636-2662,
CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE: Vacant

MISCELLANEOUS OFFICES

WEB PAGE – DIGITAL PUBLISHING: Dan Radmacher, danrad@mac.com, (540) 798-6683,

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY: Cristyn (Crys) Bauer. 2151 Herring Road Kingwood WV 26537 (304) 997-2160, wvhc50@gmail.com
PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Cory Chase, 1602 Appalachian Highway, Dryfork WV 26263, (304) 599-4906
HIGHLANDS VOICE EDITOR: John McFerrin, 202 Van Tassel Court, Morgantown, WV 26508, (304) 291-8305, johnmcferrin@aol.com

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.

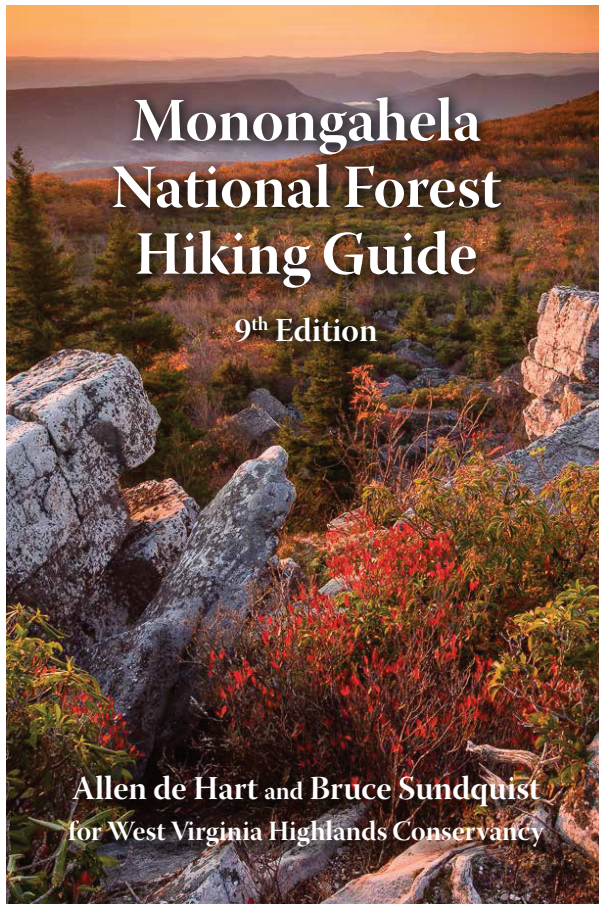
**Send \$18.95 plus \$3.00 shipping to:
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy**

P.O. Box 306

Charleston, WV 25321

OR

**Order from our website at
www.wvhighlands.org**



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 October sees the greatest concentrated influx of visitors to the Dolly Sods area, and the Wilderness Stewards were out in force doing their part to support the wilderness in the face of the onslaught. Particularly on Saturdays, there is a near-constant flow of visitors to the busiest trailheads from midmorning to late afternoon, and the Trailhead Stewards rarely get more than a five-minute break. Even teams of two Stewards are hard pressed to keep up, but we have found that visitors will often wait in line for the chance to get an orientation and advice for their venture into the wilderness.

We also had a chance to add up and summarize the number of hours that Wilderness Stewards have donated to the support of Dolly Sods over the past year. Here are some observations on both topics.

Trailhead Stewards

October in the West Virginia highlands is all about fall color, and Dolly Sods often seems like the epicenter of that. The brilliant scarlet of the blueberry,

huckleberry and chokeberry leaves of the heath barrens, interspersed with spruce groves and pockets of deciduous tree color make the plateau of the northern part a unique sight. Cottongrass and cranberries light up the bogs. Golden cinnamon ferns surround the trunks of oak, beech, birch and maple and complement the colors of their crowns.

A hike up Red Creek offers a rich mixture of a colorful canopy above, crispy fallen leaves on the trail, boulders and waterfalls along the streams. Those who venture to an overlook can take in the dramatic view of Red Creek canyon with a gumdrop assortment of colors on the canyon walls. Even the long roads bordering the wilderness offer a variety of views of trees in different hues, rock outcroppings, overlooks to the east, and a lining of persistent asters, snakeroot and goldenrod along the edges.

The Nature Conservancy's Bear Rocks Preserve, adjacent to Dolly Sods Wilderness on the northeast, has an unparalleled

combination of a red blueberry carpet, windswept flagged spruce trees, fantastically-shaped boulders and stunning views of the brilliant colors on the slopes of the Allegheny Front, with the ridge and valley terrain of eastern WV and beyond.

It isn't any surprise, then, that the Dolly Sods is also the epicenter of weekend fall excursions. Though summer and spring weekends can be very busy, the four weekends from the end of September through mid-October can be overwhelmingly so. Visitors converge from hundreds of miles around and make the bumpy drive up the mountain to

Bear Rocks Preserve and the trailheads on Forest Roads 75 and 19.

The Bear Rocks parking lot fills immediately, and cars pull into the rocky meadows and park on both sides for a half mile down the road; more than 200 vehicles have been counted in just this area. Cars coming from opposite directions cannot pass each other on the narrowed road, and gridlock can occur, with traffic at a standstill for



Traffic jam at Dolly Sods

long periods. Similar overflow situations occur at the other trailheads, particularly Blackbird Knob and Red Creek.

This may seem like merely a front country annoyance, but it affects the wilderness, too. When people have to contend with the hassle and delay of traffic that may be worse than what they experience back home in "civilization," their attitudes and expectations for the wilderness are affected. They arrive at the trailhead stressed and preoccupied, and may be less prepared for a wilderness experience. They are less likely to appreciate the essential characteristic of wilderness – its wildness – and may regard it as just another park. People may feel less personal responsibility for acting in ways consistent with wilderness values. It isn't hard to see how an attitude influenced by a traffic jam can contribute to greater impact on the wilderness, as well as to the visitor's own experience.

One way that our Trailhead Stewards can help is to be a

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

bridge between the frustrations of the civilized world and the calming influence of the wilderness. By greeting visitors at the trailhead and welcoming them to Dolly Sods we can help reorient their attention to their wilderness visit, and replace the irritation of the road with the vision of a wilderness experience. We can get them thinking about what the wilderness is all about, and help them plan a route that would be consistent with their time, energy and expectations. We can remind them of Leave No Trace principles and the importance of minimizing the evidence of their presence, and help them be prepared for the particular conditions they will encounter in Dolly Sods.

No one is under any illusions that the Trailhead Stewards are the antidote for the tortured, tangled traffic adjacent to the wilderness. That is an issue that clearly needs to be addressed by both the Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy in order to create an environment that is consistent with arrival at a wild, natural area. But in the meantime, we do our part help with the transition from the aggravation of civilization to the wonder of the wilderness.

Volunteer Hours

The Forest Service operates on a fiscal year from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30, and part of our responsibility as partners is to report on our volunteer activity during that year. That includes summing up the number of volunteers and the number of hours they devoted to each of our projects. Here is a breakdown of the results, and a few comments:

Trailhead Stewards (not counting transportation time): 574.5 hrs.; 22 volunteers

Trailheads were reliably staffed during peak times on every weekend from mid-May to the end of October. Training was held in May, which resulted in the addition of about 30 Stewards. However, we still cannot cover all of the main trailheads during all the busy parts of the weekend. To do that we simply need a larger pool of volunteers, each willing to contribute a little time, even just occasionally.

Solitude Monitoring (Training, 35 surveys of four hours): 160 hrs.; 19 volunteers

Arguably the most enjoyable of our activities, this allows volunteers to simply hike an assigned trail for four hours, recording the number of groups and other hikers they encounter. This year we used a more advanced procedure, and the Stewards came through famously, completing all the surveys on time and according to specifications.

Campsite Inventory (including training field surveys, hiking all trails, training, field testing of app and procedure): 200 hrs.; 13 volunteers

This is the most challenging project we have done to date: recording the location and condition of all the campsites in Dolly Sods accessible by a system trail. This required the Stewards to hike a

several-mile trail segment, looking for signs of campsites, spend about 30 minutes at each site making measurements and observations, and often following obscure social trails leading to a string of sites. Each of the 33 segments typically took the better part of a day to complete. As a result, we discovered and reported on about 350 campsites.

Registration box monitoring and delivery (approx.): 50 trips x avg 25 min: 21 hr; one volunteer

Maintaining the registration boxes, collecting the registration sheets, tallying them and summarizing the results allowed for the assessment of the popularity of different trailheads, proportions of day hikers and backpackers and other key usage information, for the first time in years. The data has led to an estimate that about 35,000 people visit the Dolly Sods backcountry during the course of a year.

Total Volunteer-hours in the field: 955.5 hrs. **Development and admin time not included in above (approx.):** Includes office time, research, promotion and speaking, development of forms and procedures, contact with volunteers, organizing training and project schedules, etc: 650 hrs.

Total Volunteer-hours: 1605.5 hrs.

This is an impressive result, especially for a volunteer program completing its first full year of activity. While it is impossible, at this point, to quantify the positive impact on the well-being of Dolly Sods Wilderness, we have every reason to believe the efforts of the Stewards are contributing to the preservation of its wilderness character. The Trailhead Stewards engaged in direct contact with visitors, which almost certainly caused many of them to think twice about how to conduct themselves in the wilderness. The data we collected through registration boxes, solitude, and campsite monitoring gives the Forest Service solid evidence on which to base decisions and actions to effectively manage the wilderness.

I provided this information in my report to the WVHC Board during the Fall Review. I want to pass on the Board's enthusiastic and heartfelt thanks to all our volunteer Wilderness Stewards for their dedication, skill and effectiveness in supporting Dolly Sods. You truly are making a difference, one that may well last long into the future.

It's Not Just Trees

By Paula Stahl

Deep in the hills of northern West Virginia is a small community called Leadmine. They changed the signs a few years ago to say, "Lead Mine," but before that, it was always one word. This community is interwoven with the Monongahela National Forest, with private lands and forest service lands interlaced through the area. Farms and land that have been held by families for generations have been passed down. Some of the farms that have been broken up are now cabins and camp sites, and homes for those who wanted to "live out," and in this wooded environment.

The area was clear cut in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as was all of WV. My Grandfather went to work "in the logging woods" when he was six years old, carrying buckets of water for about 30 cents a week. He was born in 1896, so that makes the forest that has grown since then well over 100 years old, qualifying it as an old growth forest.

The land is rich and beautiful, with Native Brook Trout streams, abundant wildlife, and endangered plants that still grow in the area. The terrain is lots of hills with steep sides and a small creek between each one, all covered with hardwood forests. The roads are one lane, full of curves and slick in the winter. There is no natural gas, or cable or some other services. The people who live here sacrifice a lot of modern

conveniences to live in and enjoy this area. It is a conscience choice.

Last spring, I got word that the Forest Service was planning a project called The Upper Cheat Project to clear cut 3,500 acres of forest in this area. Having sworn long ago



A white bergamot in Leadmine

to be a voice for this forest, I began to get involved.

The first step was a letter of objection during the public commenting period. Next, there was a public meeting in a town 14 miles away, because the Forest Service would not travel to Leadmine. That meeting, to me, was nothing more than them corralling us around in a circle, then herding us from one person to the next, patting us on the head, telling us, "We know what is best for you."

I talked to the water expert about the Tier 3 protected streams, and the algae

blooms that have been happening recently. He assured me that the water temperature increase is not happening because of timbering, but because of climate change. But one of the biggest causes of climate change is deforestation. We then discussed the great amount of clear cutting that has already taken place in the area on some private lands. He agreed, they have done a horrible job. I shared my concern about the combined impact of the logging that has already been done, with the additional 3,500 acres proposed, and asked if he had a map showing both. Not with him he said, but he could email it to me.

In later email correspondence, he sent me a map of the Potomac River. When I questioned that, he said they considered the area similar enough. The Potomac River is far away from the area we are talking about, and not at all the same. The water expert passed me on to the next man. He was the plant expert, who assured me he was from this area and his family has land there. That cannot be true because I would have known him. This is a small rural area. My son would have gone to school with him.

This plant expert told me there were no plants in this forest to worry about. I told him I have 30 years of photos of plants taken on my daily walks that prove that is not true. In fact, I have photographed and

(More on the next page)

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 comms@wvhighlands.org or by real, honest to goodness, mentioned in the United States Constitution mail to WV Highlands Conservancy, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321.

Leave a Legacy of Hope for the Future

Remember the Highlands Conservancy in your will. Plan now to provide a wild and wonderful future for your children and future generations. Bequests keep our organization strong and will allow your voice to continue to be heard. Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life.

More about the trees (continued from previous page)

documented many endangered plants in the area. I was referred to the next person. None of these people make the final decision. We may as well have gone and whispered in a well, for telling them our concerns did nothing.

I did correspond by email to several Forest Service employees, even providing photos of the endangered plants I had taken and marked on a map where they could be found. They are moving forward—telling me that they stay so many feet away from a plant, or the streams—so that is good enough.

This forest is a resource with a money value, and they see it as something that will regrow. It will not regrow in our lifetime. It takes at least 60 years for trees to grow to any size, and another hundred years from now for it to be a mature forest again.

Old growth forests play essential roles in wildlife habitat, species diversity, hydrological regimes, nutrient cycles, carbon storage and numerous other ecological processes. I know these things. Yet, we were treated like they were the ones who were educated and know all the facts their books have taught them. I wrote letters and contacted every office and everyone I could think of, with little to no response. I mentioned things like flooding, land erosion, fire risk, property values, endangered plants, tourism, deforestation, fragmented forests, and the fact that there are protections in place for old growth forests and Tier 3 protected streams, but no one seems to be protecting them.

I contacted the Council for Environmental Quality and did get one phone call back from them. I have reached out for an update. In the meantime, local people had the opportunity to file one last objection, which we did. The Forest Service is “considering” it.

I wish I could stand the CEOs who make this decision on the hill with my Grandpa. I grew up following him through these woods. He was born here and raised by people who

were born here, who were raised by people who were born here.

There is a branch of the Seneca Trail that runs through the area, long ago forgotten, but I was shown where it is. There is the Allegheny Trail and other paths the Indigenous people of long ago traveled. Some of my ancestors were German immigrants who were the first settlers in this local area, and who then intermarried with the Indigenous people who traveled those paths.

I followed Grandpa in the misty mornings, through the foot trails of the forest as he showed me plants and taught me what they were used for and how to gather them. I listened to him tell me the history of the place, and all the events that happened there. He spoke often about the years after they clear cut the area. How there were floods that washed out things that had to then be rebuilt, and even changed the property lines as the streams would move one way or the other after the floods. Flood channels can still be seen all over the area from those days. It was the landowners who had to deal with the aftermath of course. The timber cutting company was long gone, with their pockets full of money.

The expense of the results left behind were felt for years. Not only that, but in the days when people depended on those fields for crops, and the wildlife for food, that too was impacted, causing the ache to be not only in the heart and billfold, but in the belly.

One of the largest trees ever cut in WV when it was deforested at the turn of the last century was cut in Thunderstruck Hollow, right near my home, and the same place is proposed to be clear cut again.

I wish these decision makers had to sit and listen to Grandpa tell me about when that tree was cut, and how that is when he quit working in the log woods forever. It saddened him deep in his heart. He had nightmares about it

and the next passing years proved there were reasons for those nightmares.

I wish they could stand by him, on the top of the hill overlooking the mist laying in the bottom meadow by the stream and feel the dew in the grass and smell the fresh forest air and watch the Heron fly overhead. I wish.

They say that they will lose money doing this project. I ask, then why do it? They say for the health of the forest—an idea that makes no sense to me at all. Not far away toward Maryland is the Cathedral Forest, the only virgin timber stand left in WV. It seems perfectly healthy, without ever being cut.

The virgin forests my grandfather saw here as a child were healthy, too. Only arrogant men think they can improve on what Creator has designed in my opinion. And what about the money the state makes from selling out of state hunting licenses to the people who come here for that reason? The annual Fishing Derby is held here, the YMCA camp is here, all these things and places will be greatly impacted.

I have a photo I took on a daily walk of my hand holding a blossom of a White Bergamot. That is one of the plants on the Forest Service's own list of endangered plants. I can list many more growing here, and clear cutting 50 feet or so away from them is not going to make them prolific. Seeds blow in the wind, bulbs spread, but only if the area nearby is suitable for their growth. Our wild space is getting smaller and smaller, and more fragmented. Fragmented forests are a big deal for wildlife. My fear is that this clear cutting of timber simply gets the trees out of the way, so the next project has an easier time being approved, things like fracking, pipelines and windmills. That is my fear, that this time, this forest will not get the chance to regrow.

Join Now !!!

Name_____

Address_____

City _____State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____Email _____

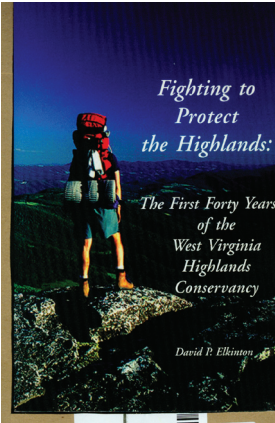
Membership categories (circle one)			
	Individual	Family	Org.
Senior	\$15		
Student	\$15		
Introductory	\$15		
Other	\$15		
Regular	\$25	\$35	\$50
Associate	\$50	\$75	\$100
Sustaining	\$100	\$150	\$200
Patron	\$250	\$500	\$500
Mountaineer	\$500	\$750	\$1000

Mail to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, P. O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321

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

You may also join on-line at www.wvhighlands.org

GET A GREAT HISTORY BOOK



For the first time, a comprehensive history of West Virginia’s most influential activist environmental organization. Author Dave Elkinton, the Conservancy’s third president, and a twenty-year board member, not only traces the major issues that have occupied the Conservancy’s energy, but profiles more than twenty of its volunteer leaders. From the cover by photographer Jonathan Jessup to the 48-page index, this book will appeal both to Conservancy members and friends and to anyone interested in the story of how West Virginia’s mountains have been protected against the forces of over-development, mismanagement by government, and even greed.

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.

SUCH A DEAL!

Book Premium With Membership

Although *Fighting to Protect the Highlands, the First 40 Years of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy* normally sells for \$15.95 plus \$3.00 postage. We are offering it as a premium to new members. New members receive it free with membership. Existing members may have one for \$10.00. Anyone who adds \$10 to the membership dues listed on the How to Join membership or on the renewal form will receive the history book. Just note on the membership form that you wish to take advantage of this offer.

The Cost of Clear-Cutting our National Forests

By Steve Coleman and John Coleman

You would think the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) would be at the forefront of combating climate change. Its mission [statement](#) is to “sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forest and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

As owners of a farm surrounded by the Monongahela National Forest, my family was very interested in what the USFS proposed in its [management plan](#) for an area of the national forest called the Upper Cheat River. Given its mission, we expected to see a plan that promoted policies and practices that helped combat the climate crisis and helped improve this area of mountains, forests, farms, and small communities. We were surprised to find that that these expectations were not fulfilled.

What we found instead was a plan calling for mostly clear-cutting nearly 3,500 acres of mostly older forest. A plan that emphasized the use of helicopters for logging land too steep for traditional means, increased fragmentation of the forest through a practice called daylighting, and the use of other practices that did not seem to fit with the agency’s mission.

As we read further in the Environmental Assessment, we expected to see the argument that despite the negative environmental impact of some of the practices, the project was justified because it would bring in revenue and support the local economy. But instead, the Environmental Assessment [calculated](#) that the project “showed a negative present net value (PNV) of -\$1,366,012 and a benefit/cost ratio less than one.” Indicating “a poor economic return for the project.”

In other words, not only would clear cutting be permitted, but it would also be supported through taxpayer’s money. It wouldn’t help to reduce the deficit, but rather contribute to it. It wouldn’t fight climate change, but rather make it worse.

We looked for the United States Forest Service’s justification for carrying out a project that was to cost taxpayer 1.4 million dollars. (Perhaps not much when compared to the overall federal budget but significant when one considers this is just one project in just one national forest in the country.) What we found as the primary justification for the project was that the forest in the project area was too old and cutting major sections of it would reduce the average age of the remaining trees.

According to the Forest Service, creating a younger forest would, among other things, [reduce carbon in the atmosphere](#). By cutting down older trees and using them for construction, you remove the carbon in these trees from the natural environment. The younger trees that grow to replace the older ones suck up additional carbon from the atmosphere. But the science is not clear on whether, on

balance, replacing older trees with younger ones does in fact reduce carbon in the atmosphere. The USFS would need to show how much of the cut timber would actually go into construction or other long-term uses. In fact, much of the hardwoods harvested in this national forest go into laying down temporary wooden roads for oil pipeline construction.

There are many things we do not know without more assessment of the project. However, here’s what we do now from the Forest Service Environmental Assessment:

- Over 50% of logging will be done by helicopters. Helicopter companies will be brought in from out of state so there is little benefit to the local economy. Helicopters are expensive and have a large carbon footprint.
- Clear cutting trees may increase and will certainly not decrease the flooding and erosion that is currently happening in the project area. This is especially true for land that is steep enough to require harvesting by helicopter.
- Some of the actions proposed by the USFS, like daylighting (clearing trees from along the sides of forest roads), will increase the presence and spread of invasive species because they are adapted to open areas.
- While the Upper Cheat River Project most directly affects those who live within its geographic boundaries, it indirectly impacts us all. Federal tax money is used to fund the project. The policies established during the approval process for this project are likely to set a precedent for other projects.

So, what should be done:

- Leave areas that are too steep for traditional logging as is. The monetary and climate costs of using helicopters to harvest timber is not justified.
- Leave areas with old growth trees as is. Old growth trees serve many purposes, such as carbon sinks, they reflect the mature forests that once dominated this land and are treasures to be appreciated by current and future generations.
- Support the USFS worthwhile efforts to fight aggressive invasive species that are crowding out rare and threatened species across our forests and USFS efforts to reduce flooding and water pollution by, for example, reclaiming eroding logging roads that were created during previous clear-cutting projects.
- Reassess the impact of the project on the climate crises. The science and scope of the climate crises has grown since the original USFS Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Monongahela National Forest was done in 2006.

Board Highlights

By John McFerrin

For the first time in a long time we crawled out of our little Zoom boxes and had a meeting in person.

The meeting featured some new faces. First, we had Olivia Miller, the new Communications Director. She will take over the editing of *The Highlands Voice* as well as manage other aspects of our communications such as social media. Read more about her on page 4.

We also welcomed Sarah Hinnant. The Bylaws of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy provide for both individual and organizational members. The Friends of the Cheat is an organizational member and had applied for a seat on the Board, an application which the Board eagerly granted. The organizational member gets to pick its representative to the Board; the Friends of the Cheat picked Sarah.

In the absence of Treasurer Bob Marshall, Larry Thomas presented the financial report. We are doing well on revenue and are under the budgeted amount on our spending. Because this was a deficit budget we still have a deficit for the year to date. We will be able to cover that deficit from our savings.

Program Director Cory Chase reported on his activities. The outings program has been a great success. We have had good attendance and several people who came to the outings signed up as prospective members. We had been pursuing an AmeriCorps volunteer. We had some interviews but some took other positions and some didn't seem to fit well with our needs. As a result, we are not going to have an AmeriCorps worker this year.

Cory has been working with WV S.U.N. on its solar collective in Tucker and Randolph Counties. It organizes groups of homeowners who want to install solar power so that the individual homeowners can buy collectively and make solar power cheaper. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is one of the sponsors of its efforts in Tucker and Randolph Counties. He has also been helping in some presentations to schools about solar power.

Cory has also been communicating with the Clean Water Coalition, a group of about 270 groups centered around the Chesapeake Bay. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is already a member; his discussions have been about our becoming more active. Finally, he has been working with the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy highways committee about Corridor H. They are developing suggestions on how people might present comments on proposed routes.

Larry discussed his vision for outings for next year. He envisions outings to (1) meet supervisors of various ranger districts within the National Forest; (2) have work days directed by the ranger district; (3) have fun; (4) appeal to school children.

Membership and Fulfilment Secretary Cristyn Bauer reported on her activities. She has been manipulating the database to produce lists of the number of members in each county, the number in each state, etc. She would also like to create more ways for members to renew online, get notices that their memberships are expiring online, etc. She would also like to streamline our membership levels. Between the membership levels, individual and family memberships, etc. we have a lot of membership categories. She wants to straighten that out. Because this involves detailed work, President Larry appointed a committee to figure this out.

Luanne McGovern reported on matters legislative. The West Virginia Environmental Council has adopted legislative priorities: community solar, safe drinking water, plugging orphan gas wells, and above ground storage tanks. Anything having to do with public lands will always be a priority.

She made the observation that the session is just wild, particularly near the end. It has been her experience that the real action is in the committees and that once something gets to the floor the deals have been done. We hope to have a system for sending our members action alerts by the time the session starts.

George Hack reported on the Futures Committee. They have been talking about another facilitated meeting to talk about the future of the organization and future involvement in the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative.

Rick Webb reported on public lands. The committee is currently monitoring all proposed projects on the Monongahela National Forest. Streams in the forest are constantly being degraded by sedimentation.

Dave Johnston reported on the activities of the Dolly Sods Stewards. Dave estimates that the stewards have spent almost 900 hours doing work on the Forest. If one includes the office time Dave has spent doing planning, etc. the total is almost 1500 hours. Read more about the Stewards' activities on page 12.

We are starting to run low on Hiking Guides. While we will not run out immediately, our stock is low enough that it was the sense of the meeting that we should have more printed. Larry will find out some additional information and then will probably order another 1,000.

Susan Rosenblum reported on the work of the rivers committee. It has been involved with training citizen scientists to do background testing on streams that lie in the proposed route of Corridor H. The training is complete and they are ready to go. She hopes that the training and testing program can be a model that we could use in other areas.

She has also been working with the Water Policy Work Group. They are working on the Safe Drinking Water Act and potential proposals to reclassify trout streams.

Fall Review Wrap-up (continued from p.9)

infrastructure and technology to make blue hydrogen viable.

The day wrapped up with a lively presentation by keynote speaker Professor James Van Nostrand of WVU's College of Law. Van Nostrand specializes in environmental law and energy policy and recently wrote and published the book, *The Coal Trap*, documenting what he refers to as "The Lost Decade" that paved the way for poor energy policy and diversification in WV. Between 2009 and 2019, WV politicians aligned themselves with the coal industry, to the detriment of the citizens and the state's economy. During this time utility rates in WV began to increase.

By direction of the state's Public Service Commission, the two major utility companies in WV are currently required to continue operating coal-fired power plants at their historical capacity, even if cheaper sources of energy are available in the wholesale market or from nearby solar and wind projects. The percentage of electricity generated in WV from coal actually increased from 88% in 2020 to 91% in 2021, leading West Virginians to be paying some of the highest utility rates in the nation.

One of the biggest obstacles for diversifying energy in WV lies in the hands of the officials of the Public Service Commission, who are appointed by the Governor. For now, at least, new federal policies that are promoting clean energy are not in line with WV's state policies that are still clinging to coal. You will hear more about Van Nostrand and his work in future issues of the Voice.

The fact of the matter is that our energy grid is not a just one. Some people across the nation are benefitting from clean and renewable energy production in their homes, while others are being trapped into fossil-fuel energy generation and higher rates by backward policies. The transition from extractive to renewable energy is a lot to untangle and will likely be painful, but we are well on our way.

By the end of the day, our brains had soaked up as much information as humanly possible, but we were feeling motivated and inspired. I speak for us all in saying our weekend reconnecting with each other in person and outside of our grid view of Zoom meetings felt extra special coming off the back of the pandemic. The weekend wasn't all science, either, on Friday evening, we enjoyed a potluck dinner accompanied by a campfire, live music by Corey Bonasso, and a great deal of laughs and conversation. Jackie Burns lead a bird walk and Susan Rosenblum lead a mindfulness walk.

Save the Date for the 2023 Fall Review!

Oct. 13-15 at Canaan Valley State Park Lodge

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.

Would you like to be part of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards?

Visit wvhighlands.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 contact you once these programs are ready to be implemented.



- 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 earthtone light brown and feature the spruce tree logo. Sizes M-XL [Shirts run large for stated size.] \$ 25.00, 2XL \$26.50

To order by mail [WV residents add 6 % sales tax] make check payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Online Store, PO Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321-0306

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.