



# *The Highlands Voice*

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

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## **Air Quality Permit Withdrawn for Proposed Hardy County Log Fumigation Facility**

By Olivia Miller

In mid-April, a proposed log fumigation facility in Hardy County made national news after Allegheny Wood Products sought an air quality permit from the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Air Quality.

Allegheny Wood Products had planned to tuck the toxic-spewing facility away in the quintessential West Virginia countryside in Baker—a peaceful unincorporated community full of farms, families, and forest along the Lost River.

After overwhelming public outcry and bold pushback from the Hardy County Commission and environmental groups, Allegheny Wood Products formally withdrew the air quality permit on May 24. The company cited “a further review of our business needs” as a reason for the application's withdrawal.

According to the company's now rescinded permit application, the facility would have emitted 9.4 tons a year of methyl bromide—a toxic fumigant that kills fungi and

wood-boring insects. Prolonged exposure to the chemical can cause central nervous system and respiratory failure in humans and can harm the lungs, eyes, and skin, according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

On May 4, at the Division of Air Quality's virtual public hearing, local residents and public officials made it abundantly clear that they would not stand for the construction of this facility near their homes and farms. More than 160 people at-

tended the public hearing that lasted nearly four hours.

One concerned citizen mentioned the proximity to East Hardy High School, only five miles from the proposed construction site; others stated that this would cause long-term health problems for their family and friends. One forthright commenter asked, “Are you really the Department of Environmental Protection?”

A brief presentation during

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## Board President Larry Thomas Passes Torch at WVHC

With both sadness and gratitude, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Board of Directors announces that Larry Thomas will resign as president.

Thomas has served as the president of the Conservancy's Board of Directors since 2018. He was first appointed to the board in 2007 and later as chairman of the renewable energy committee.

Under Thomas's leadership, the Conservancy has achieved remarkable milestones, forging strong partnerships with fellow conservation organizations and government agencies while expanding programming. His vision and dedication have been a testament to his exceptional leadership skills and genuine dedication to the cause we all hold dear.

Throughout his tenure, Thomas has initiated many successful programs, such as the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards program, the hiring of the first staff member of

the organization, and the restart of its outings program to foster environmental stewardship in the highlands. Thomas has served on the boards or committees of partner organizations and successfully led the organization through the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the last two years alone, the Conservancy has significantly increased its bandwidth and outreach with the hiring of a program director, membership director, and communications director. With the hiring of the communications director, Thomas helped oversee the transition of the editorship of *The Highlands Voice*, the monthly publication of the Conservancy.

Since 2018, the Conservancy has played an active role in the opposition of many environmental threats, most notably the now-defeated Atlantic Coast Pipeline, timbering of West Virginia public lands, and the issue of off-road vehicle use on public lands.

Through the Atlantic Coast

Pipeline opposition, the Conservancy formed a close partnership with the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, which has led to the development of a Conservation Hub Site and interactive map detailing the destruction of expanded off-road vehicle use.

More recently, the Conservancy published the first volume of "Making a Difference: Practical Actions That Individuals Can Take to Reduce Their Impact on the Climate." The booklet, available online and in print, suggests ways that individuals can take advantage of the benefits of the historic Inflation Reduction Act and other measures that to reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Thomas will remain on the board as past president and play an active role within the organization as chairman of the finance, public lands, and renewable energy committees.

We are incredibly grateful

for Thomas's direction and extensive contribution to the organization over the last five years. We have all benefited tremendously from his service and dedication to the Conservancy and his passion for protecting the highlands of West Virginia.

Marilyn Shoenfeld will assume the role of president of the Conservancy. Shoenfeld, of Davis, West Virginia, is a longtime environmental champion and has served on the board for nearly two decades. We are confident that her leadership will continue to shape the Conservancy's future and contribute to the preservation of the Highlands for generations to come.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we wholeheartedly support Shoenfeld and look forward to working collaboratively under her guidance to fulfill our mission of safeguarding the Highlands. We extend our gratitude to her for accepting this role.

## Thoughts from our New President, Marilyn Shoenfeld

By Marilyn Shoenfeld

I am honored and terrified to accept the challenge of the Presidency of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. The organization has been in my life since the 1980s when my husband, Peter, now deceased, was on the Board of Directors and created the first web page.

I participated in the Mon 2000 challenge, writing the current Mon Forest plan and many other activities. After joining the board, I continue to be impressed with the wide variety of talent, knowledge, and passion for the Highlands in this group.

Larry Thomas has moved the Conservancy to the forefront of environmental activism in West Virginia. Under his leadership, the organization has thrived and grown. Not only

has he started the activities listed above, but he has imbued the board and the membership with a new spirit and energy by both personal example and inspiring group actions. It is going to be difficult to fill his shoes, but I am going to try.

I am a retired school librarian and administrator and have lived in Canaan Valley for 20 years. I personally observe the environmental problems that face us—increased development, water issues, abuse of public lands, transition to clean energy and many others.

Environmental education is crucial to the younger generations. I have worked with the Friends of the 500th at the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge and have chaired the

Environmental Education Committee for years. We endeavor to bring environmental awareness to the local schoolchildren.

My goals for the Conservancy include continuing to work with our partner organizations and public state and federal agencies to fulfill our mission of protecting the Highlands, to work with all our wonderful committees to continue and further their efforts, and to inform and involve our membership.

If you have any questions about the transition or organization, please get in touch with me at [marilynshoenfeld@gmail.com](mailto:marilynshoenfeld@gmail.com) or by phone at 304-940-5737. I look forward to working with all of you.

*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.**

# Nine New Sites Added to WV Waterfall Trail

By Maggie Susa

The [West Virginia Waterfall Trail](#) has nine new stops, bringing the total to 38. Since its launch last June, the statewide trail has received over 35,000 participant check-ins, with visitors from 49 states and 15 countries.

The trail has received rave reviews, which inspired the Department of Tourism to ask West Virginians to help identify new waterfalls. Those nominations led to the addition of the new falls, which are:

**Westerly Falls** -- This short-dropped waterfall spans Paint Creek, in Fayette County. With water plummeting from 5 to 7 feet, Westerly Falls is one of the more subtle, yet dynamic, falls in West Virginia. Tackle the short and moderately steep walk from the roadside pulloff to creek level for a closer view.

**Pipestem Falls** -- With a 30-foot-plus drop on Pipestem Creek, Pipestem Falls is located along Route 20, approximately 11 miles south of Hinton. Follow the wooden steps by the pulloff and let the roaring waters guide the way, as the summer leaves hide the falls from the road.

**Falls Mill** -- Just off U.S. 19 on Pleasant Hill Road, in Braxton County, is a wide cascade spanning the entire width of the Little Kanawha River

**Parkinson's Waterfall** -- Nestled in Bethany College's leafy and historic campus, this waterfall is a familiar feature to students and a surprise for visitors. Make your way along Campus Drive until you come upon a trailhead sign near the Stein-

man Fine Arts Center, marking the Waterfall Trail. The Waterfall Trail and Sutton Trail form a loop that is approximately one-mile long.

**Mann's Creek Falls** -- Enjoy sightseeing the many layers of cascading waters at Mann's Creek Falls, in Babcock State Park. Begin your journey at the Narrow Gauge trailhead located on the service road below the park's campground.

**Sugar Camp Run Falls** -- Sugar Camp Run Falls is one of a handful of waterfalls at Babcock State Park. Water rushes between several angular boulders, creating a unique flow, especially after heavy rainfall. Parking in the Glade Creek Grist Mill lot provides easy access to the Old Sewell Trail.

**Flanagan Branch Falls** -- Flanagan Branch Falls is tucked away on the Old Sewell Trail at beautiful Babcock State Park. You can park near the historic Glade Creek Grist Mill and begin your waterfall venture on the Old Sewell Trail.

**Tucker Falls** -- Located at Mason-Dixon Historical Park near Morgantown, Tucker Falls is a 14-foot waterfall. This park borders the Mason-Dixon line, making Tucker Falls one of the most northern waterfalls in the state. Take a stroll along the banks of Dunkard Creek on Green Trail and cross over to Orange Trail for a combined one-mile walk.

**Loopemount Waterfall** -- Located near mile marker 8.1 on the 78-mile Greenbrier River Trail, the



**Blackwater Falls (West Virginia Department of Tourism)**

Loopemount Waterfall is one of the most remote waterfalls in the state. Park near the Harper Road trailhead and walk north. Meander for a little over 2 miles along the lush rail trail to find this Greenbrier County gem. This wide waterflow is the strongest during the springtime, but there is a gentle stream during the warmer months.

Visitors can win prizes while exploring the falls, including a West Virginia Waterfall Trail-branded sticker, water bottle and T-shirt, all exclusively available through the program.

With the addition of these new waterfalls, the state Department of Tourism has commissioned Base Camp Printing Company, in Charles-

ton, to create a limited-edition waterfall art print that will be mailed to the dedicated explorers who check in at all 38 cascades along the trail.

"It's a unique offering for West Virginia as we continue to build our reputation as a true outdoor recreation state," said Tourism Secretary Chelsea Ruby.

Checking into the Waterfall Trail is made possible by Bandwango, a travel technology platform. To get started, visit [WVtourism.com/waterfalls](https://www.wvtourism.com/waterfalls) and register.

Those who have already registered and want to restart their adventures can text "resend waterfall trail passport" to 1-888-921-5333 to be connected with a support agent.

*This article originally appeared in the Charleston-Gazette Mail.*

*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.*



# A Recap of our Bird Outing at Blackwater Falls

By Cory Chase

We had a full gaggle of birders for our first outing of the year on May 21 in Davis. On a brisk and breezy Sunday morning, we set out from the Allegheny Trail parking lot and hiked into Blackwater Falls State Park along the Blackwater River. The rain from the previous day made for that scintillating spring combination of moisture and coolness, and we were fortunate that the weather was in full cooperation as the sun was there to warm us up along the way.

Our guide was Casey Rucker, an accomplished birder who has recently helped co-edit [The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds](#) in West Virginia with West Virginia State Ornithologist Rich Bailey. Casey is also the editor of [The Redstart](#), the scientific publication of [Brooks Bird Club](#).

Casey also had an assistant, famed Parsons Lafontaine Bakery owner Mimi Kibler (retired baker, I should say...and sad for all of us ciabatta lovers!) Mimi diligently recorded all the birds we encountered on the Cornell University bird app, [eBird](#).

Many of us, myself included, had our phones out to use the partner Cornell Lab app called [Merlin](#), which has a brilliant feature that allows you to identify birds in real time by listening to their calls. Thank goodness because, in the forest, it can be pretty hard to spot them, loud or even bright as they may be. Casey mentioned that this tool can be a great teacher and also a crutch.

Like any tool, it depends on how you use it. The Merlin app has all sorts of recorded calls for the plethora of birds, but Casey also cautioned that humans should not use these calls to try to call in birds as it could be stressful and confusing to the birds. And in many cases, it is actually illegal! A life sentence of no more binoculars would be crippling to any birder (that is sarcasm; I don't know what the rules or penalties are).

Usually, when the foliage is

out like it was on this day, you tend to hear the birds more often than you get to see them. Once we got out of the woods and into the open, we did see more birds than when we started, and we warmed up more, too. While not that natural, some of the easiest birds to watch were perched on a power line. Still, we did see birds flitting by, circling overhead, and hopping around in the grasses and moss closer to the glamping sites in the park. And one Ruby-throated Hummingbird was hardly phased by us as he zipped from flower to flower on some trees along the trail.

Occasionally, Casey would pipe up with fascinating information and recent discoveries about birds. One such tidbit was the [fairly new research about how birds navigate by being able to see the earth's magnetic field](#). A chemical being studied in birds' retinas called cryptochrome is hypothesized to have magnetic receptivity. This "microscopic magnet" may allow birds to see the magnetic field and act as a sort of internal compass. Now I want to know what it is like to see that! Alas, I will have to remain a homo sapien.

As of this writing, we do not have any other bird outings scheduled yet, but the interest from our members and the general public hints that we could do this at least a few times over the summer if not more. Keep your eyes out for more outings here in the Highlands Voice and on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

In total, we observed 22 different species and 61 individual birds. Here is the list that Mimi compiled on eBird. Thanks, Mimi! And thanks to Casey and everyone that came out with us. And a special thanks to the birds.



A group of members and supporters gathered at Blackwater Falls State Park for the first birding outing of the year.

## Bird Count:

Mourning Dove 2  
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird 1  
 Killdeer 1  
 Broad-winged Hawk 2  
 Northern Flicker 2  
 Red-eyed Vireo 4  
 Blue Jay 3  
 American Crow 5  
 Black-capped Chickadee 3  
 House Wren 3  
 Gray Catbird 1  
 Brown Thrasher 1  
 American Robin 4  
 American Goldfinch 3  
 Song Sparrow 5  
 Eastern Towhee 4  
 Red-winged Blackbird 2  
 Common Grackle 3  
 Common Yellowthroat 7  
 Yellow Warbler 1  
 Chestnut-sided Warbler 1  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler 3





# Making a Difference: New Climate Guide Available from WVHC

In April, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's climate change committee published its first edition of a new publication, **Making a Difference: Practical Actions That Individuals Can Take To Reduce Their Impact on the Climate.**

The following is an excerpt from the publication. If you wish to view the publication in its entirety, visit [wvhighlands.org/climatechange](http://wvhighlands.org/climatechange)

Topics covered include: Making your home energy efficient, transportation, in-home electricity, food consumption, reuse and recycle, forestry, water use and getting involved.

We are very excited to share this publication with our members and hope you find value in its contents.

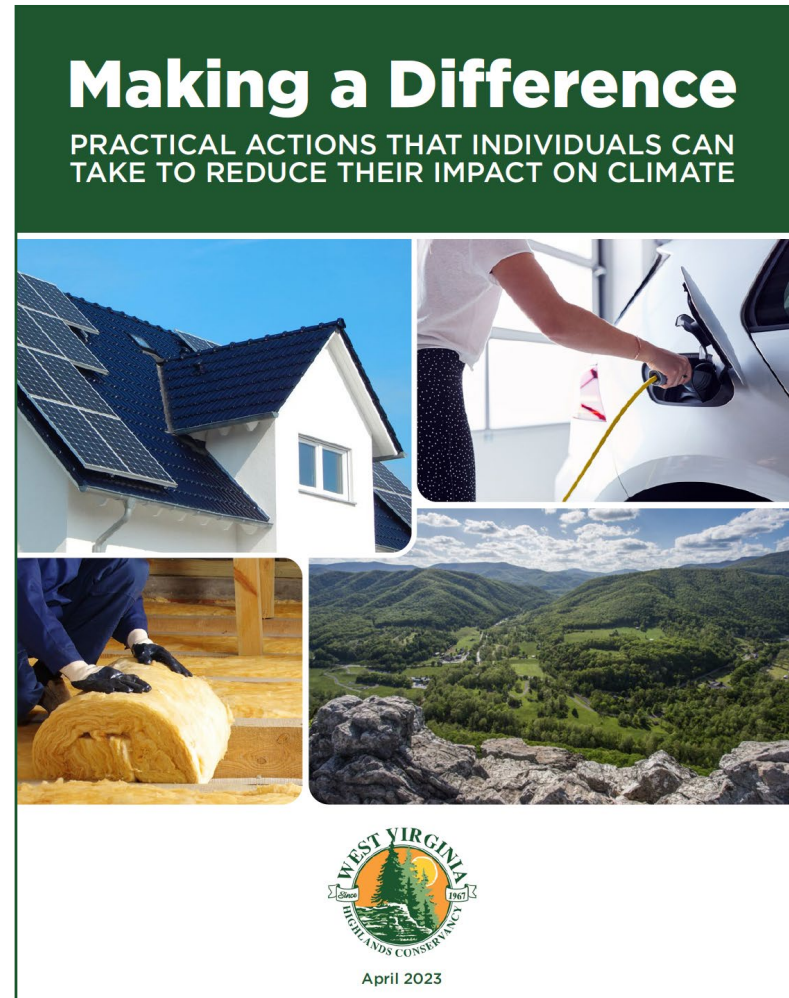
In passing the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the United States Congress made the largest investment in clean energy ever.

This historic legislation is projected to invest almost \$370 billion in clean energy — solar, wind,

battery storage, geothermal, etc. — over the next ten years. As historic as the IRA is, and it has the potential to be transformational, it does not require individuals to make their homes energy efficient or require utilities to switch from using coal to renewables. The IRA does provide generous incentives or carrots, but few requirements or sticks. So, if the IRA is going to achieve its objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet the U.S. commitment under the Paris Climate Agreement, each of us will need to take action.

This booklet suggests ways that individuals can take advantage of the benefits in the IRA as well as other measures that individuals can take to reduce greenhouse gases that cause global warming. As important as individual responsibility is, it is not the only means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The guide is our list of practical actions that individuals can take to help preserve the Earth's climate. It is not an exhaustive list, but a starting place for action.



## Welcoming a New Member to our Board!

At the quarterly Board of Directors meeting held in April, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy welcomed Andrew Young to the board as a director-at-large.

Young is a law student at George Washington University Law School specializing in Environmental, Natural Resource, and Land Use Law. He currently clerks for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the Office of Compliance and Enforcement Assurance's (OECA) Water Enforcement and Cross-Cutting Policy Divisions.

He serves on the Board of Directors for the Cowpasture River Preservation Association and has been with the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance since 2018 when he first surveilled the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines with the Pipeline Airforce.

Andrew has a bachelors in politics from Pomona College. He is an avid whitewater boater, skier, hiker, and runner, with a strong connection to the Central Appalachian Highlands.

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## THE WAY THE VOICE WORKS

The Highlands Voice is the official publication of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. While it is the official publication, every story in it does not represent an official position of the Conservancy. While all of our members share the general goal “to promote, encourage, and work for the conservation—including both preservation and wise use—and appreciation of the natural resources of West Virginia and the nation,” our members often have differing views upon the best way to do that.

As a result, stories in The Voice often reflect different points of view. The Conservancy itself, however, only speaks through its Board. The only stories that reflect the official policies of the Conservancy are those reporting Board actions, including litigation positions we have taken, comments on proposed regulations, etc.

# Mountain Valley Pipeline Mayhem

By Olivia Miller

The past month has been nothing short of mayhem in the rush to remove all obstacles standing in the way of the Mountain Valley Pipeline and wreak havoc on West Virginia's precious water, air, mountains and all who lie within.

As has been reported many times over the years in The Highlands Voice, the construction of the 303-mile pipeline through Virginia and West Virginia has already racked up hundreds of water quality violations and polluted miles of streams. To pour salt in the wound: there are still 429 water crossings left to go.

There are many reasons why this pipeline is a bad idea, not only for its impacts felt close to home but also for the broader impact to be felt by the global community as climate change continues to worsen as a con-

tinued result of fossil fuel extraction.

[An analysis from Oil Change International](#) estimates that the annual greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Mountain Valley Pipeline would be almost 90 million metric tons. This is equivalent to the emissions from 26 average United States coal plants or over 19 million passenger vehicles. This estimate does not include construction emissions. The total vegetation clearance needed for construction is approximately 4,856 acres, including crossing the Jefferson National Forest and the Appalachian Trail.

On May 2, Senator Joe Manchin moved to hardball the project by introducing the [Building American Energy Security Act of 2023](#), requiring federal agencies to issue the Mountain Valley Pipeline its outstanding

permits within thirty days of its passage and change how energy projects are handled by federal agencies.

In response to the bill that would fast-track approval for the Mountain Valley Pipeline and exempt it from federal permitting guidelines, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy joined 33 organizations, led by [West Virginia Rivers Coalition](#), in a letter urging President Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to protect West Virginians' right to fair and equal treatment under the law.

According to West Virginia Rivers Coalition, at the time of this writing more than 1,000 individuals have added their voices to defend West Virginia communities and the environment.

The letter asserts that com-

munities in West Virginia are already paying the price of decades of environmental degradation and increased health risks as a fossil fuel energy sacrifice zone.

Despite these valid concerns, on May 28, West Virginians received word that the Biden Administration had made plans to steamroll over any hurdles to completing the Mountain Valley Pipeline by sliding it into a deal with House Republicans to raise the nation's debt ceiling.

The attempt to give the Mountain Valley Pipeline a free pass would effectively bypass the review process required for every other energy project and weaken national environmental review laws.

The debt ceiling legislation

*continued on page 8*

## Cancelled Log Fumigation Facility in Hardy County *continued from page 1*

the hearing from the Hardy County Commission revealed that the commission had found out about the proposed facility in the same fashion that the public did through the public notification made in the Moorefield Examiner. Hardy County Planner Melissa Scott said the proposed location off U.S. Route 48 is zoned for agricultural use, not industrial use. She thanked the Department of Environmental Protection for holding the public hearing, as it was not required, and asked the public to support them as they pushed back against the zoning permit.

The fierce opposition to this facility sent a clear message that people are tired of the repeated attacks on the environment and their health and that when we stand together, we can fight back against polluters and win.

### More on methyl bromide:

Most uses of methyl bromide, an odorless, colorless gas, were banned under the 1987 Montreal Act, an international agreement to protect the ozone layer, because of its ability to deplete the ozone layer. It is considered a class one ozone-depleting substance. The United States and 197 other countries restricted most uses of methyl bromide, including in soil applications for crops.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the phase-out of the use of methyl bromide began in 1994, and another took effect in 1996. However, several exemptions from the phaseout include certain agricultural uses, critical uses, and quarantine and pre-shipment uses. These exemptions are valid until an acceptable alternative is found, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture

has not yet approved one.

So, essentially, the use of methyl bromide in the United States has been banned, but not really.

[The Environmental Protection Agency's webpage dedicated to methyl bromide](#) notes that agricultural growers still inject methyl bromide nearly two feet into the ground to sterilize the soil before crops are planted. It is also used to treat grapes,

asparagus, logs, and other imported goods to prevent introducing pests to the U.S.

In a real head-scratcher, the immediate paragraph following this statement made by the Environmental Protection Agency regarding agriculture use, the Agency reiterates that methyl bromide is a toxic substance. Sounds like a great substance to be treating our food with, aye?

### Get Emails from Us!

For decades, we have communicated with our membership through The Highlands Voice, but there's a new kid on the block.

Sign-up to receive emails from up by visiting [bit.ly/WVHCemail](https://bit.ly/WVHCemail) or by scanning the QR code to the right.





# New Planning in the Mon: Is it Time to Begin?

By John McFerrin

It's time again. The planning document that directs activities in the Monongahela National Forest is due for an update.

The Monongahela National Forest, as do all National Forests, operates on the basis of a master plan. For the Mon, it is the Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, commonly referred to as "The Plan." It sets goals for the forest, identifies areas of the forest where certain activities would be appropriate, and generally lays out a plan for how the Forest Service manages the forest.

The original plan was done in 1986. The last major revision was in 2006, with minor revisions in 2011. A new plan is supposed to be done every ten to 15 years, so it is time for the Plan for the Monongahela National Forest to be revised. Although there has been no formal announcement, rumor has it that the Forest Service has begun work on a revision.

Revising the Plan is a long process with many opportunities to participate. Although the final Plan was not issued until September 2006, in April 2004, The Highlands Voice had an article about the planning process and urging people to participate. According to the story, by that time the Forest Service and some members of the public (including the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy) had already been having discussions about Forest Plan revisions for a year.

For those concerned about the management of the Monongahela National Forest, this is a big deal. By law, the Forest is supposed to be managed for "multiple use," which the law defines as "for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes." The Plan defines how the Forest Service will go about balancing these interests.

While the Plan does not com-

mit the Forest Service to doing or not doing a specific project, it does direct how projects are selected and carried out. For advocates both for and against any specific project, having language in the Plan can be a powerful tool. If, for example, someone is concerned that a particular project does not do enough to protect old growth forests, a Plan commitment to old growth forests would be helpful.

The Plan is supposed to be comprehensive, so, anything could theoretically be on the table. Among issues to be discussed are:

**Forest health, including how that is defined.** The timber industry defines "forest health in terms of ability to produce lumber." A broader definition would include a broader view of forest health, including all species and their interactions.

**Roadless areas.** Leaving some areas of the Forest without roads preserves the wild nature of those areas. Roads also provide a route for invasive species, traffic, and accidental fire to enter parts of the Forest.

**Wilderness areas.** A new Plan would potentially identify areas that are suitable for formal Wilderness designation.

**Logging.** The Monongahela National Forest does contain some valuable timber. At the same time, equivalent timber can be found on nearby private land. How the timber on the Forest will be managed is a recurring question.

**Off highway vehicles.** Currently off highway vehicles are not allowed in the Monongahela National Forest. The next Plan could help determine whether this remains the case.

**Watershed protections.** The Forest is home to the most ecologically healthy streams in the state, including most of the naturally reproducing trout streams. A Plan would set out how those streams are to be protected.

**Recreation.** The Monongahela National Forest is currently home to outstanding recreational opportunities. The Plan will have to address how those opportunities are to be maintained, including how they can be maintained without interfering with the other purposes of the Forest.

**Threatened, endangered, and sensitive species.** There are several species that are found in the Forest. The Plan will have to account for them, including how the Forest Service will manage the Forest in a way that protects them.

Things have changed in the 17 years since there was a new Plan for the Monongahela National Forest. While climate change was known in 2006, it was not top of mind as it is today. Floods and wildfires will do that. The 2006 Plan made scant mention of climate change; the minor revision in 2011 added several mentions of the term although there was nothing that committed the Forest Service to doing anything that accounted for climate change. Most of the 2011 changes could be summed up as "we know there is such a thing as climate change; what we are doing fights climate change; we are going to keep on doing what we are doing."

Since then, we have had a directive from the Secretary of Agriculture on the importance of fighting climate change. [Secretary Vilsack Directs USDA Forest Service to Take Bold Action to Restore Forests, Improve Resilience, and Curb Climate Change](#). The Forest Service will have to take the issue more seriously this time around.

There is also a newly listed endangered species that a revised Forest Plan will have to consider: the candy darter. Already there are allegations that, under the present Plan, it is not being protected. See the May 2023 issue of The Highlands Voice. The next Plan will have to address

protections for the candy darter and other species.

One final new thing is enhanced protection of old growth forests. In 2022, President Biden issued an executive order which, among other things, recognized the value of old growth forests and directed federal agencies to take steps to protect them. [Executive Order on Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies](#). With this as the current federal policy, the Forest Service would have another reason to emphasize old growth forests in a new Forest Plan.

As the planning continues, The Highlands Voice will have more information, including opportunities of make comments or otherwise be involved.

As an added bonus, this is an opportunity for connoisseurs of acronyms to really step up their game. The 2006 Plan has a list of three- and one-half pages of acronyms that the Plan uses. It includes such favorites as CMS (Cheat Mountain Salamander), AMS (Analysis of the Management Situation), DFC (Desired Future Condition), and VBEB (Virginia Big-Eared Bat). For those wishing to expand their acronym vocabularies, the planning process will present a plethora of possibilities.



# The Nature Conservancy Protects Big Cove Tract in Canaan Valley

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in West Virginia has protected 1,971 acres of important lands in Canaan Valley, Tucker County, WV. The tract, called “Big Cove,” was purchased from Western Pocahontas Properties. The property borders the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (CVNWR) to the south and is west of the Dolly Sods Wilderness.

Conservation of this property protects unique wildlife habitat; secures public access for hunting, fishing and recreation; and creates vital habitat and trail connections in the northern end of Canaan Valley.

Big Cove sits in the northern end and is the crown of Canaan Valley, a biodiversity rich and climate resilient landscape. It expands habitat from the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge that features many rare species that occupy the forest,

stream and wetland habitats in this area. The tract’s position on the landscape also ensures it will continue to allow nature to adapt to climate change and will be an important refuge and migration corridor.

In addition to the importance to nature, Big Cove will also provide essential ecological services for people and be complimentary to local recreation economies.

The U.S. Forest Service’s Forests to Faucets analysis identifies this landscape as in the second highest of 10 categories for national surface drinking water importance.

Finally, Canaan Valley plays an outsized role in the tourism and outdoor recreation economic sector of West Virginia, and protection of Big Cove secures key public access for recreation, as well as additional trail connections in the area.

“Protection of Big Cove is a great complement to the larger development and recreation plans that are being worked on in the Davis-Thomas-Canaan Valley area,” state TNC West Virginia Executive Director Thomas Minney. “We believe this project helps ensure key natural areas are protected, while also allowing for it to be a part of the larger vision for trails, recreation and tourism. Conservation and development can be done in complementary ways to continue to benefit Tucker County and its residents.”

TNC is dedicated to engaging with stakeholders to help develop recreational and lands management planning for the tract and the broader Canaan Valley/Dolly Sods landscape.

*The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization*

*working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 18 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 117 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Together with our members and conservation partners, the Conservancy has protected more than 125,000 acres of critical natural lands in West Virginia. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the web at [www.nature.org/westvirginia](http://www.nature.org/westvirginia)*

## What a Difference a State Makes

By Lowell Markey

According to an Associated Press article dated April 25, 2023, the West Virginia Public Service Commission allowed Monongahela Power and Potomac Edison to move forward with finalizing a plan they project will cost electric ratepayers at least \$36 million to cover the cost of purchasing the Pleasants Power Station at Willow Island, and keeping the two-unit, 1300 MW station operating.

The request by First Energy—holding company for both Monongahela and Potomac Edison—was urged by state republican leadership and will allow the two subsidiaries to study the possibility of adding the Pleasants Power Station to their power production holdings. Otherwise, the station’s more than 150 employees will lose their jobs after its May 31, 2024, closure date. If the station

closes, it would likely be demolished by its owner, Energy Transitions and Environmental Management, of Texas.

Originally scheduled for closure in 2018, Pleasants has received millions of dollars in bailouts from state republican leaders that have extended its life for years.

Meanwhile in Western Maryland, First Energy is pursuing a buy-out of its power purchase contract with AES Warrior Run, a coal-fired power station near Cumberland. According to an April 28, 2023, story in the Cumberland Times-News, a buy-out figure of \$357 million has been reached between Potomac Edison and AES to terminate the contract seven years early. The proposal has been submitted to the Maryland Public Service Commission for approval.

Potomac Edison officials said the buy-out could save customers roughly \$80 million in surcharges.

According to Allegany County Commissioner Dave Caporale, who spoke with AES officials, the company is considering converting the Warrior Run power station to a wood-fired biomass facility which the company sees as more of a green resource than coal.

## MVP Wrap-Up

*continued from page 6*

would direct key agencies to issue all necessary permits and mandate that “no court shall have jurisdiction to review any action taken” that grants an approval necessary for the construction and initial operation of the project. The debt ceiling bill text states that, “Congress hereby finds and declares the timely completion of construction and operation of the Mountain Valley Pipeline is required in the national interest.”

Senator Joe Manchin said [in a statement](#) on May 29 that he was very proud of himself for fighting to get MVP across the finish line.

At the time of this writing, it is unknown whether the debt ceiling legislation will pass, and we will continue to provide updates in The Highlands Voice and on our social media channels.



## 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 Crys Bauer at membership@wvhighlands.org. 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.

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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.

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# New Babcock Trail Provides Access to Abandoned Gorge Coke-Making Community

The West Virginia State Park system's newest hiking and biking trail provides a link to the New River Gorge's industrial past, while giving those who travel it a chance to explore miles of Babcock State Park's rugged canyon terrain.

The new trail follows the path of an 8.5-mile narrow gauge railroad, completed in 1886, that connected the now-abandoned coke-producing town of Sewell on western shore of the New River with coal mines along Manns Creek and at Clifftop, near the rim of the Gorge.

After the rail line was abandoned, its right-of-way was converted into a road, which later became a pathway for four-wheel-drive vehicles until it was closed several years ago when it became impassible due to washouts and neglect.

In February 2022, Gov. Jim Justice directed the state Department of Transportation to rehabilitate the dilapidated road for re-use as a public hiking and biking trail connecting Babcock to its boundary with New River Gorge National Park and Pre-

serve. The new trail has a not-so-new name — the Old Sewell Road — in recognition of its former role.

Work involved in converting the former railbed and road into an all-season, crushed rock-topped trail was completed within a year by a state Division of Highways crew, using proceeds from a \$350,000 federal grant to pay for structural materials, including timber and steel for a new bridge.

The trail begins at the parking area for the oft-photographed Glade Creek gristmill. For the first half-mile or so, the trail follows the paved access road behind the mill leading to Babcock's guest cabins 1-13. The official trailhead is found soon after the pavement ends at a gate crossing the road a short distance downhill from Cabin 13.

Spring wildflowers, towering cliffs, giant trees and the remnants of stone support piers from the old railroad are among trailside attractions along the route.

About 1.5 miles down the trail from the gristmill, Babcock's Narrow

Gauge Trail intersects with Old Sewell Road, providing access to a swinging bridge crossing of Glade Creek. About 2.5 miles beyond that intersection, a century-old boiler rests at the edge of the trail, where a new steel-supported wooden bridge crosses Flanagan's Branch at a small waterfall. The new bridge makes use of the stone buttresses that once supported a railroad trestle at the crossing.

According to a sign posted at the site, the boiler was once used to power a locomotive that traveled the narrow gauge line. According to a 2010 article in *Trains* magazine, the boiler was first used to power a sawmill and later repurposed as a water tank serving the steam-powered Shay locomotives traveling the line.

A few hundred yards down the grade from the boiler and bridge, deposits of fresh bear scat began to appear in the trail tread. Soon, a young adult black bear could be seen resting on a boulder on a steep slope about 100 feet uphill. Once aware of the presence of humans, the bear abruptly scrambled up the slope and

out of sight.

Not long after the bear sighting, a break in the forest canopy allowed a section of the New River to come into view, and a trestle carrying the C&O Railroad across the stream could be seen.

The Old Sewell trail ends just short of a National Park Service boundary marker posted at the edge of the former road/railbed. The grade continues on National Park Service property toward the townsite of Sewell, but an abundance of downed trees and thick brush make walking or biking on the right-of-way challenging.

About a half-mile downslope from the state park boundary, an open white gate and a sign warning visitors not to disturb cultural resources can be seen off the right side of the roadway. By following that boulder-strewn, barely discernable roadway downhill and then looking carefully, remnants Sewell come into view.

The townsite lies just across

*continued on page 11*

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



## More on New Babcock Trail

*continued from previous page*

the New River from the National Park Service's Cunard River Access facility.

Sewell took shape on land once owned by Peter Bowyer, who built a cabin and began operating a small farm and ferry service here in 1798. Bowyer may have been the first person to establish a home and business in the New River Gorge.

The small settlement that sprang up at Bowyers Ferry was later named Sewell, in honor of Stephen Sewell, one of the first White settlers in the upper Greenbrier Valley.

As construction of the C&O Railroad through the New River Gorge neared completion, the Longdale Iron Co. began buying coal land in the vicinity of Sewell. In 1873, months after the rail line through the Gorge was ready for use, Longdale opened its first mine at Sewell.

One year after Longdale opened its first mine at Sewell, the company's first coke ovens began production here. Longdale was the first of what would become more than a dozen companies to produce coke in the New River Gorge, and pioneered the use of "beehive" style coke ovens.

Within 10 years, the company was operating 196 coke ovens, making Sewell the top coke production site in the Gorge. Coke continued to be produced at Sewell until 1956, long after other New River Gorge coke ovens ceased operations.

By the mid 1880s, the mines fueling Longdale's coke operation at Sewell began running out of coal. Company officials asked civil engineers from the C&O to see if it was financially feasible to run a new, narrow gauge branch line up Manns Creek and on to Clifftop at the top of the Gorge, to reach company coal

reserves. After C&O's experts concluded that the proposed branch line was not feasible, the company consulted Charleston engineer William G. Reynolds, who told them the job could be done, but it would cost \$100,000.

Reynolds designed and oversaw construction of a 3-foot wide rail line, the Manns Creek Railroad, which was completed in 1886.

In its heyday in the early 1900s, Sewell had a population of more than 300 and supported a store, hotel and sawmill.

Today, a still-flowing springhouse, the walls and chimney of an office building and vault, and many of the town's coke ovens are among remnants of Sewell that can still be seen.

The National Park Service urges visitors to take care to avoid injury while visiting cultural resource sites like Sewell, and to leave all artifacts in place. Visitors to Sewell are also cautioned not to trespass on the active CSX railroad right-of-way which lies between the townsite and the New River.

Round-trip hiking distance between the townsite of Sewell and Babcock's Glade Creek gristmill is about 12 miles. The Old Sewell Trail is equipped with 12 strategically placed benches to provide comfort to weary hikers.

A recent round-trip hike to Sewell, which included a lunch break and an hour of exploration time at the townsite, took about seven hours. Those traveling the trail are urged to bring water and wear sturdy shoes or boots.

*This article originally appeared in the Charleston-Gazette Mail.*

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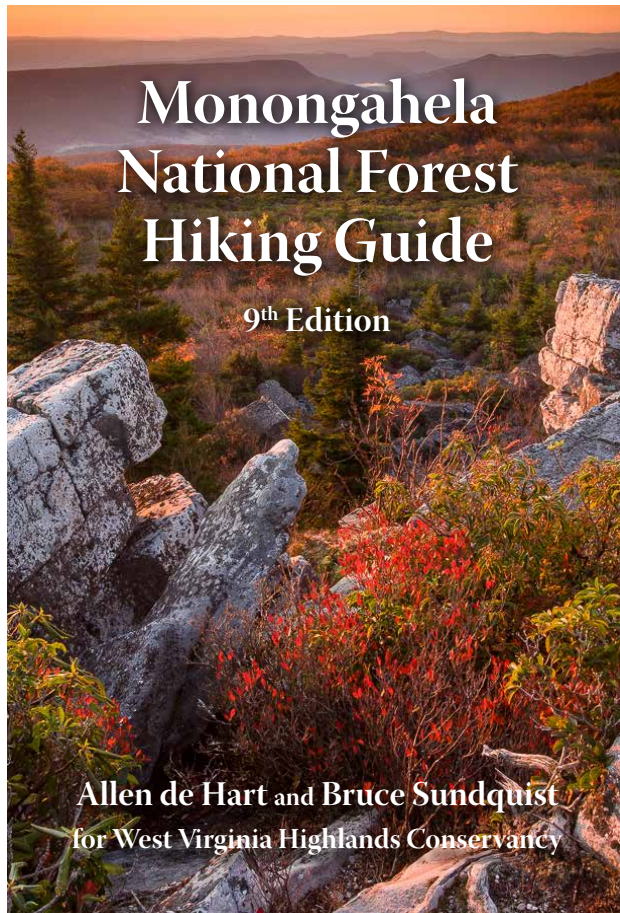


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