



The Highlands Voice

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

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Opposition to the Dangerous, Unnecessary Mountain Valley Pipeline Continues

By Maury Johnson

In 2014, I was notified that a large conglomerate of so-called ‘natural gas’ corporations wanted to run a 42-inch interstate pipeline across my ancestral organic farm in Monroe County, West Virginia.

This began my nearly ten-year saga of learning about the dangers of, and becoming a fierce opponent to, this insane ‘ticking time bomb’ project.

The opposition to this project is a classic David versus Goliath story. Most government agencies, elected representatives, and even some organizations—[like the Appalachian Trail Conservancy](#)—have sold out to the pipeline developers.



Mountain Valley Pipeline construction in Monroe County, West Virginia. (Photo by Maury Johnson)

As most readers of The Highlands Voice newsletter probably know, completion of the MVP has been delayed for over five years. It was virtually dead until West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin, working with Republicans and a few powerful Democrats who cater to the Fossil Fuel industry, inserted what is popularly known by those fighting the MVP as the “Dirty Deal Provision” into the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.

This provision, officially named Section 324, was attached to the end of the ‘must pass’ Fiscal Responsibility Act to avoid a debt ceiling crisis.

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Thoughts From Our President

It is the end of February as I write this. Our beautiful winter turned into an early mud season this month. There has been a lot of rain and flooding in parts of the Highlands. Plants and animals are confused as climate signals are mixed, which highlights the importance of the work of our Climate Change Committee and the work of other environmental organizations.

We are all struggling to raise awareness of climate change issues with individuals, corporations, and the Legislature. While some progress has been made, there is much more to do with identifying and implementing solutions. Your help is needed—join our committee or send us your ideas.

The West Virginia Legislative session is drawing to a close. There have been some okay bills, a couple of good ones and a lot of really bad ones. Our team, with the West Virginia Environmental Council, and other groups, have been tirelessly working to move forward the bills that are good for the environment and discourage legislatures from passing bills that harm the environment. As they are still in session until March 9th, a detailed report will be in the next issue of The Highlands Voice by our Legislative Committee Chair Luanne McGovern. I want to express my thanks to the team that has been meeting with legislatures, monitoring bills, testifying as necessary and doing everything else to ensure that minimal damage is done.

Here is more of what we've been up to:

The Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI) held their quarterly meeting and WVHC was

represented; we hope to participate in the tree plantings in 2024 and work on outreach to share more about CASRI's efforts.

Next month, Olivia and Crys will be sharing news about our revamped **Mountain Odyssey Program: Outings, Education and Beyond**, which will offer several opportunities to reconnect with nature this summer and meet members of WVHC through guided hiking trips, bird walks, mushroom meanders, a paddle trip and more.

Our Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards are gearing up for what we hope will be one of our most successful seasons yet. The program is expanding, and you will hear more from Dolly Sods Wilderness Steward Coordinator Dave Johnston about upcoming trainings and a new Backcountry Stewards team on page 14.

Our Highways Committee has been increasingly more active as the Notice of Intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed section of Corridor H between Parsons and Davis was published in the Federal Register in early February. The comment period for the Notice of Intent closes on March 27. Matt Marcus of the Blackwater Bicycle Association discusses the two routes being studied on page 9 and details the impact both routings could have on hiking trails in Tucker County.

As part of the Go North Corridor H Alliance, members of WVHC's Highways Committee had a productive meeting with the Monongahela National Forest in February to share concerns about the road's construction on our public lands. The fight to protect

Water Quality Monitoring Training: March 24

Please help keep our rivers and streams healthy and clear! West Virginia Rivers Coalition, in partnership with Friends of the Cheat and West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, will hold a training for Parsons and Davis community members on how to visually monitor highway construction activities and report potential pollution incidents. This training will be held on March 24, 2024 at the Parsons Community Center, 96 Parkwood Lane, Parsons, West Virginia.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Jenna Dodson, Staff Scientist, West Virginia Rivers Coalition at jdodson@wvrivers.org.

the Blackwater Canyon and protect our streams and communities continues.

Earlier in February, WVHC achieved a big milestone—we are happy to share that we now have 3,000 members, prospective members and general supporters. Our members are the reason we can continue to grow our staff and outreach. As our membership grows, we have a stronger and more effective voice at the State Capitol and can make more progress toward safeguarding our mountains and streams. Please consider passing along your copy of The Highlands Voice to a friend and encouraging them to become members.

In other news:

We are saddened to hear that Angie Rosser is leaving the West Virginia Rivers Coalition. She has been an incredibly effective leader for 12 years;

we wish her well in her next adventure. Please read Cindy Ellis' thoughtful farewell to Angie on page 11.

Our next Board meeting is coming up. **It will be at Chief Logan State Park on Sunday April 21, 2024 at 10 a.m. On Saturday, April 20, there will be an outing to Matewan with a tour of the Mine Wars Museum and a stop at the Hatfields' Cemetery.** Our members are invited to join, and we will be sharing more details through email in the coming weeks. We hope to see you there!

As always, your comments and thoughts are welcome. We would love more input from our members! Send to marilyn.shoenfeld@gmail.com.

Thanks, and see you in the mountains!

Sincerely,
Marilyn Shoenfeld, WVHC President

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.

WVHC 2024 Legislative Update

By Luanne McGovern

Editor's Note: When you receive your copy of the March issue of *The Highlands Voice*, this Legislative Update may be outdated. To keep close tabs on the session, make sure to sign up to receive our action alerts via email at <https://bit.ly/WVHCemailsignup> and follow WVHC on social media.

The West Virginia Legislative session will be drawing to a close on March 9th after consideration of over 2,500 bills. There are many important bills still in play, and it can be hard to predict what will happen. But many thanks to all our supporters who made their voices heard to your Senators and Delegates throughout the session – it DOES make a difference. Although there is not a great deal of good news to report, your continued support is greatly appreciated.

Here is an update on our key priorities, as of the end of February:

Net Metering: to protect and preserve long-standing net metering rules to ensure all solar users are entitled to the existing fair market retail rate.

Two bills (SB869 and HB5131) were introduced to ensure that solar producers would receive full market value for the power they produce, but neither bill was advanced.

In January, the West Virginia Public Service Commission held a public hearing on Mon Power and Potomac Edison's proposal to drastically reduce the amount that solar producers are paid for the power they generate. A compromise was reached to (1) grandfather existing solar producers in to the one to one net metering rate, and (2) to set a new rate of \$.09343/kWh for interconnections made after January 1, 2025. For further details on the compromise read John McFerrin's story on page 5.

Orphaned Gas Well Responsibility: to require bonds to be set before

drilling begins to cover plugging costs for gas wells that are abandoned or orphaned.

SB532, the Orphan Oil and Gas Well Prevention Act of 2024 (similar to HB5414) was introduced by Senator Smith. Unfortunately, this bill did not move out of committee and so is dead for this session.

Community Solar: to promote access to affordable renewable energy through a solar facility subscription service.

Several bills have been introduced to help move the state forward with Community Solar opportunities. All were stalled in committee, continued victims of the coal lobby. Passage this year is again unlikely.

Other bills we have been monitoring:

- **SB171** - Prohibiting county commissions from adopting authorization that exceeds state law regarding agriculture operations. This bill was passed and signed by the Governor. It will centralize power at the state level and eliminate local government's ability to protect residents, businesses and farmers. This unfortunate power grab by the state will make citizen efforts to fight unwanted local projects even harder than before.
- **HB5018** - To provide for Department of Environmental Protection oversight and authority governing community air monitoring programs. So far, this dangerous bill, which was passed by the House, has stalled in the Senate. Many thanks to everyone who testified at the House public hearing, and sent emails and phone calls to your Legislators. Hopefully this bill will die a quiet death, but we are still watching closely.
- **SB688** - Authorizing director of Division of Forestry to contract and

manage forest land. This bill would allow the Division of Forestry and the Division of Natural Resources to "contract for the management of state owned and leased forests and wooded lands for purposes of preventing wildfires." We are very concerned that this would open state parks and forests to large scale timbering, in the name of forest fire prevention. The bill was passed by the Senate and is currently with the House Government Organization

Committee.

- **SB618** - Authorizing Division of Forestry to administer certain exchange program. This bill would authorize the Division of Forestry to set up a statewide carbon credit exchange program for all forested property in the state. It would supersede all voluntary forest carbon credit programs currently in effect, taking away landowner rights. It has passed the Senate and is with the House Finance Committee.



Environmental Day at the Capitol

WVHC's Program Director Olivia Miller and Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Coordinator Dave Johnston joined environmental groups from across the state for West Virginia Environmental Council's annual Environmental Day at the Capitol.

Olivia said, **"There are so many incredible groups who work year-round to promote environmental justice, protect clean air and water, advance renewable energy, and preserve our natural resources. It was rejuvenating and uplifting to connect with the environmental community and have discussions with representatives about critical environmental issues impacting our state."**

According to the West Virginia Environmental Council, 2024 E-Day was the most successful and well-attended in the event's history. We look forward to going back next year.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

Apparel

- **WVHC Cotton Hat (Black or Army Green):** \$22.50
- **WVHC Hemp Hat (Black or Green):** \$25.00
- **WVHC 100% Cotton T-Shirts (Coyote Brown, Kelly Green, Navy Blue, Black) Available in XS-XXL:** \$22.00
- **Black 50th Anniversary T-Shirt with “Celebrating 50 years” logo. Available in Small-XXL:** \$20.00
- **I Love Mountains T-Shirt Short Sleeve. Available in M-XXL:** \$18.00
- **I Love Mountains T-Shirt Long Sleeve. Available in S, M, L, XL:** \$22.00
- **I Love Mountains Toddler T-Shirts. Available in 18-months, 2T, 3T, 4T, 5/6:** \$20.00
- **Square Black Bandana:** \$5.00

Drinkware

- **WVHC Hydro Flask 20 oz. All Around Tumbler (Birch, Indigo, Black):** \$35.00
- **WVHC Hydro Flask 21 oz. Standard Mouth Flex Cap Water Bottle (Pacific, Mesa, Indigo):** \$45.00

Stickers

- **I Love Mountains Bumper Sticker:** \$3.00 for one, \$12.00 for 20

Books

- **Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide, 9th Edition:** \$21.95
- **Fighting to Protect the Highlands:** \$15.95

To order by mail make checks payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to P.O. Box 306, Charleston, WV 25321. Please indicate the item and relevant color and size if applicable. To view and purchase store items online, visit wvhighlands.org



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 two 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.)



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Net Metering Controversy Settled

By John McFerrin

The parties to the net metering controversy before the West Virginia Public Service Commission have reached a compromise settlement. While the Public Service Commission still has to approve the compromise, it will likely do so. When it does, the compromise will become the official position of the Public Service Commission, and Monongahela Power and Potomac Edison will have to follow it.

Almost all home solar systems are connected to the electricity grid. During the day, the homes produce more electricity than they need. This electricity goes into the electrical grid, available for use by other customers.

At night and on cloudy days, these homeowners use more electricity than their systems produce. During those times, they import electricity from the grid. If, at the end of the month, the homeowner has used more than he or she has exported to the grid, the homeowner is billed for the excess. The system is known as net metering.

Under the current system, the electricity the homeowner takes from the grid is the same price as the electricity that they supply to the grid. The electric company credits the homeowner for the electricity supplied to the grid from the homeowner's system at the retail rate for electricity. It then charges the homeowner for electricity that the homeowner takes from the system produced at the same retail rate. In most situations, the amounts taken from the grid and supplied to the grid are about the same, so the homeowner's bill for electricity (not considering the service charge that First Energy imposes) is close to zero.

First Energy (parent company of Monongahela Power and Potomac Edison) found this rule unfair. It said that it was paying for the distribution

system that supplied electricity on cloudy days and at night and should be compensated for that cost. If it, in effect, bought electricity from solar customers at the same rate as it sold them electricity, it could never recover these costs.

The solution that First Energy proposed was to pay solar customers the wholesale rate for electricity (about 6.6 cents per kilowatt hour) while continuing to charge solar customers for the electricity they used at the retail rate (about 13 cents per kilowatt hour). It wanted to apply this new rate to all solar customers who installed their systems after March 27, 2024.

This dramatic increase in costs to solar customers produced a firestorm of controversy. While the Public Service Commission typically gets a handful of comments on rules it is considering, about 1,500 people commented on the proposed change. The commenters included The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

Now, the parties in the dispute before the Public Service Commission have reached a compromise settlement. In the future, Mon Power and Potomac Edison will pay solar customers for the excess electricity they send to the grid at the rate of 9.343 cents per kilowatt hour. While this is less than the customers had been receiving for the electricity they produced, it is more than the utilities had proposed.

The rate will remain in effect for two years. After that, it could be changed by the Public Service Commission. It would go through the usual process that the Public Service Commission uses to set rates.

The settlement contains some other features as well. It extends the time for those who want to benefit from the current system (electricity going to the grid is the same price as electricity coming from the grid)

to December 31, 2024. Anyone who signs up to connect a solar system to the electrical grid before then can take advantage of the current rates.

The settlement also continues the present rates for current solar customers and those who become solar customers before December 31, 2024, for 25 years. Those who become solar customers before then will get to keep the current full compensation rate for electricity they produce for that long.

Finally, the settlement makes the rate stay with the solar system, even if the house is sold. If a solar customer who is grandfathered in under the old system sells the home,

the buyer gets to keep the old rate.

Right now, the settlement does not apply to customers of Appalachian Power. However, now that this settlement has set a precedent, it probably won't be long before Appalachian Power asks for the same rule.

A bill in the West Virginia Legislature would have required the Public Service Commission to maintain the current rule. While the bill was introduced, it never appeared to make any progress. Although it could still theoretically pass, it would take a Senator, Delegate, or lobbyist with a lot of power and a lot of favors to call in to step forward and drag it across the finish line.

What Is the State of our Highlands?

Your Fall Review Committee has started working on the upcoming Fall Review, scheduled for October 18th through 20th at Cacapon State Park. Save the dates and plan to attend.

When thinking about a topic for this year, we couldn't help but think about the issues we are working on right now. How do we protect old growth forests? How will roads and mines affect the endangered candy darter? How can we work towards a greener West Virginia? Are there good ways and not so good ways to sequester carbon and keep it out of the atmosphere? How do we feel about the new proposal for pumped-storage hydroelectric power? Can we build a better Corridor H? What are others doing to conserve our highlands?

We'd like to look at these issues: How do they affect the environment, and how does the environment affect them? From karst topography to shale barrens to steep mountains to sandstone and limestone, the condition of our highlands affects what we can do here, and what effects our actions have. Join us as we look at the condition of our highlands.

Opposition to the Dangerous, Unnecessary Mountain Valley Pipeline Continues *continued from page 1*

By Maury Johnson

This provision abruptly terminated most of the lawsuits against the MVP by prohibiting and depriving citizens of their constitutional rights to petition the government before the courts. It also short-circuited the permitting and review processes that have been the foundation of our nation's laws and policies for over 200 years.

Starting in June, just days after the passage of that provision, the developers of what I have recently renamed the 'Mud in the Valley Pipeline' resumed construction across West Virginia and Virginia. While some people believed that 'this was the final stroke that would break the camel's back,' most of the frontline coalitions and their allies instead rallied to reinforce their opposition.

The questionable practice of using sections of degraded pipe that had been lying on the ground exposed to the elements for over five years—despite the manufacturer's expiration warnings of the six-month limit on ultraviolet radiation and weather exposure—surfaced as a high-priority public safety issue.

This issue was first raised in 2019 by my friend William "Bill" Limpert, a former Maryland Department of Environment regulator, who was thrust into this battle when the 42-inch Atlantic Coast Pipeline was slated to cross his retirement property in Bath County, Virginia. Bill continued to research and raise awareness about the danger posed by these outdated pipe sections for the next four years, even after the Atlantic Coast Pipeline was canceled.

He was instrumental in getting the Pipeline Hazardous Materials and Safety Administration (PHMSA) to acknowledge the safety issues regarding the unprotected pipes strewn across the region. The entire environmental community was deeply affected when Bill passed away in early February this year. We will always be indebted to the tenacity of his unwavering stance for



truth and for the safety of his friends and neighbors across West Virginia and Virginia.

To date, PHMSA has not undertaken the steps to adequately ensure the safety of the people, towns, schools, and churches located in the blast zone of the MVP, but Bill Limpert's legacy of leaving no stone unturned lives on.

Some of the towns and neighborhoods where the safety of large numbers of people is at risk are: The Panther Creek Elementary School and adjacent community Health Center in Nicholas County, West Virginia; the towns of Rainelle, Pence Springs, Craigsville, and Lindside in West Virginia; and those of Newport, Elliston, Bent Mountain, and Mount Tabor (a suburb of Blacksburg) in Virginia.

This is only a mention of a few areas located in the blast zone of the MVP. The number of churches, sacred sites, family homes and farms are too numerous to list. **Once we investigate and become aware of the health risks and consequences of an explosion associated with this project, we live in fear of its life-threatening potential. But on the upside, this fear is the motivator for action.**

The environmental and climate change repercussions are equally as significant. I have been a volunteer

pipeline monitor for the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, the Indian Creek Watershed Association, and the Mountain Valley Watch program since 2015. This work has taken me several times from where the pipeline starts in Mobley, West Virginia, to its terminus in Chatham, Virginia. The sections closest to my home in Monroe County, along with those spanning from Fayette County to Giles County, Virginia, have been my most frequently visited areas.

In the month of February alone, I have traveled over 1,000 miles to conduct my monitoring. I've written over 230 Complaints to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and a few to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) over the past six years based on documented environmental and safety violations, such as erosion, slippage, silt fence collapse, illegal refueling of equipment within 100 feet of a water body, mudslides and mud tracked on to public roads, etc.

Since construction resumed in June of this past year, I have sent nearly 100 Complaints and Concerns to the West Virginia DEP covering every county in the state and a few to Virginia's DEQ.

I have attended several meetings with the PHMSA and the Pipeline Safety

Trust. These meetings have taken place in Washington DC, Arlington, Virginia, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and on my farm in Monroe County.

In December, along with Mariah Clay, West Virginia Rivers Coalition MVP Coordinator, I helped facilitate a meeting with PHMSA Officials on a site visit across four counties in southern West Virginia. **Even though I have met some caring officials, it is apparent that PHMSA is not protecting West Virginia and Virginia from the almost certain disaster that many of us living and working near this pipeline fear.**

The MVP has been called the most dangerous pipeline in America by a number of groups and individuals, including some pipeline safety experts. Indeed, at the Annual Pipeline Safety Trust Conference I attended this past fall, one of the panel discussions was entitled, 'Developments in Geo-Hazards: How are Regulators, Experts, and the Industry Addressing this Concern?'

Richard Kuprewicz, President of Accufacts, Inc., who is one of the nation's foremost authorities on Pipeline Safety, spoke about the existence of geo-hazard threats to pipelines. He specifically referenced the MVP in this comment, **"I think you heard some people this morning talk about the MVP. OK. You ought to be nervous. Congress cannot repeal the law of gravity. They may believe they think they can, but I don't believe they do. But again, more prudent operators will be ahead of that curve and try to avoid those threat factors from coming together because nobody wants a pipeline to rupture, especially a 42-inch gas pipeline that you are going to see from space."**

For more information about the Pipeline Safety Trust and to watch the videos from the panel discussions and presentations, please visit pstrust.org.

Although credit must be given to the West Virginia DEP for writing a few Notices of Violation to MVP recently, it

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A Tribute to Bill Limpert: Virginia Tree Protector and Pipeline Fighter

By Mike Tidwell

The first time I met Bill Limpert he was 71 years old and standing outside the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond. He was holding a photograph of a 300-year old tree, a sugar maple, one of the biggest trees I'd ever seen. Dominion Energy, Bill said that spring of 2018, wanted to cut the tree down for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. And not just that one. The company was planning to chainsaw hundreds of hardwoods like it on his mountainous Bath County property, trees between 300-400 years old, the largest tract of truly ancient hardwoods in all of Virginia.

"I don't intend to let it happen," Bill said. "I'm no spring chicken but I have every intention of stopping this pipeline and outliving the fossil fuel era."

Bill did stop the pipeline, giving tours of his land to reporters, raising awareness across the state, and joining thousands of other activists and authorities — land owners, retired teachers, lawyers, green advocates, federal judges, high school kids — who forced Dominion to cancel in 2020 its \$8 billion, 600-mile abomination for shipping fracked gas from West Virginia to North Carolina.

But sadly Bill's second dream did not come true. Bill passed away on February 5th in Maryland, where he had moved to take care of his aging mother. He did not live to see the end of the fossil fuel era. The cause of death was blood cancer. He was 76.

This soft-spoken ACP fighter, who played guitar on his Bath County porch when he wasn't sending detailed maps and memos to government regulators to further complicate Dominion's life, has moved on from this world — a world he made better for the rest of us.

Someone has said that the fight

to stop the ACP was so close, requiring so much effort, that the absence of any one activist might have meant Dominion got its way. Whether Bill — and his equally heroic wife Lynn who survives him — made the final difference, I do not know.

What I do know is that Bill inspired me as much as anyone I know from that pipeline fight. The first time I visited his modest home in Bolar, Virginia, up a gnarly dirt road at nearly 3,000 feet, he showed me the paw print that a bear had left the night before on the side of his house. Then he showed me a slew of ground-level photographs taken on his property. He was poring over them, looking for that one endangered rusty-patched bumble bee that would further endanger Dominion's pipeline. (He later found one.)

Bill and Lynn had arrived here only seven years earlier, moving down from their previous mountain home in western Maryland. They were, in the local parlance, "come heres" not "from heres." But they defended this land as if they had been here all their lives.

The crown jewel of that land was a 3,000-foot-long ridge that locals called "Miracle Ridge." It was steep-sided and populated, like the surrounding land, with stunningly old red oaks, sugar maples, basswoods, hickory oaks and more. A state conservation expert had said there was no other continuous stand of trees this old in all of Virginia, not even in Shenandoah National Park.

After Dominion sent a letter in 2015 saying it planned to seize the ridge through eminent domain and destroy it, the Limperts invited people to see the trees and Miracle Ridge for themselves. People came, from all over the state, some arriving by the dozens in organized caravans.

Then Bill would put on his old leather chaps and his worn-out hat and grab his hiking stick and give walking tours. After 30 minutes among the ancient trees, he would stop at the crest of Miracle Ridge and explain that Dominion wanted to literally decapitate the entire ridge. The company would use winches and chains to lower bull dozers down from nearby Jack Mountain and then scrape away the equivalent of a two-story building from the entire top of the ridge. In total, across West Virginia and Virginia, the pipeline would decapitate 38 miles of ridges like this.

In the summer of 2018, when Dominion's bulldozers and chainsaws seemed imminent, Bill and Lynn invited activists from across the region to set up a continuous protest camp on their land. From June to October we arrived in a steady flow, our tents spread among the mighty trees, ready to peacefully resist with our bodies if the worst ever came. Blessedly, the bulldozers never arrived. Court victories and grassroots pressure were crippling the pipeline. Instead that summer, we held trainings on the art of civil disobedience and enjoyed Lynn's vegetarian chili and spent many nights savoring the bluegrass music of local players on the Limpert porch.

Bill lived to see the pipeline cancelled on July 5th, 2020, a day none of us will forget. He then went on to fight



the ACP's evil twin, the Mountain Valley Pipeline, till just months before his death. I'm glad Bill saw, too, the passage of the Virginia Clean Economy Act in Richmond and the Inflation Reduction Act on Capitol Hill. Both bills are hastening the day, not that far away, when wind farms and solar energy and electric cars bring definitive closure to the fossil fuel era.

And while Bill didn't live to see that era end, the old trees on his property—now set to become a conservation easement—will see it. Many of those trees started life as forest seedlings in the early 1700s, before the start of the fossil fuel era. And many will be here, thanks to Bill, when it is no more.

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.

CORRIDOR H HIGHWAY

Not the Same Old Song

By Hugh Rogers

The words may be the same, but some old songs are changing. Consider the country hit, “I Forgot More Than You’ll Ever Know (About Her).” On records by Sonny James, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, and others, I used to hear the melancholy brag.

Now, what I hear is the “I forgot.”

On a less romantic subject, Corridor H, I have forgotten more than most readers would care to know. But help is on the way! A “story map” drawn up for the West Virginia Division of Highways (DOH) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) by the DOH’s longtime consultant, Michael Baker International, is now online.

Maps are just part of it; perhaps most important is the [Document Library](#), beginning with the 1992 Corridor Selection Draft Environmental Impact Statement (a DEIS covering the entire corridor from Weston to I-81) and continuing up to the “Informational Workshop” held at Tucker County High

School on Tuesday, February 27.

And here’s where we are now: an official re-start for the Parsons-to-Davis project. Its formal announcement, the [Notice of Intent to Prepare a Supplemental EIS for a Proposed Highway Project: Parsons to Davis](#) (the NOI), appeared in the Federal Register on February 6.

The new EIS is “supplemental” to a Final EIS published by the DOH in February 2007. That EIS did not result in a Record of Decision that would approve federal funding for construction; at that time, construction was proceeding westward from Wardensville to Davis, and there was no money available to resume building east of Elkins. The last approval of a preferred route for Parsons to Davis dated back to 1996, as part of the entire corridor. Too much has changed in the past 28 years, and even in the past 17, for it to avoid re-examination.

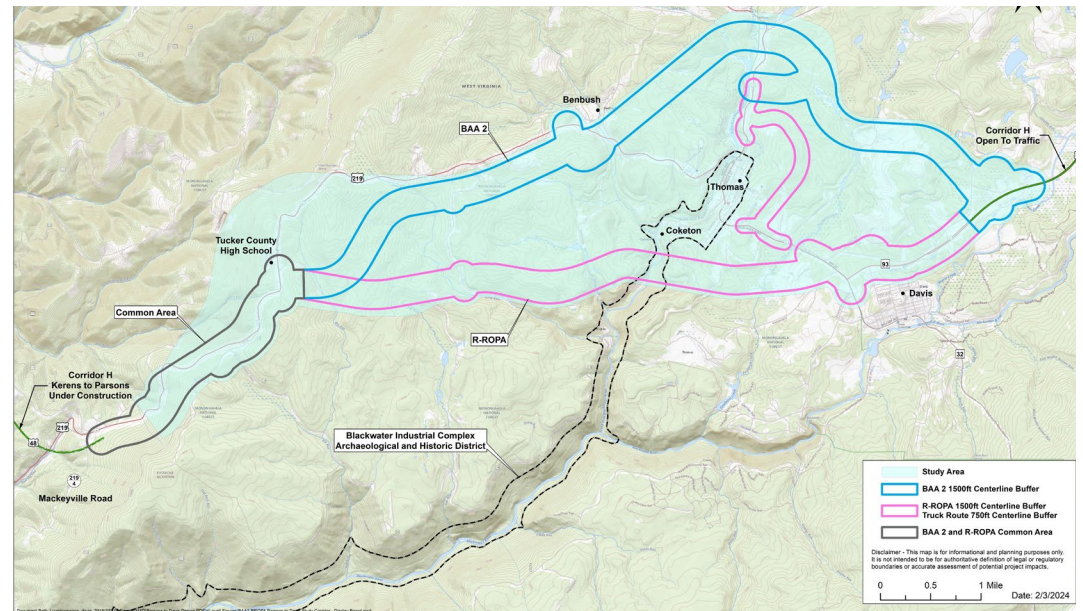


Figure 2-1: 2024 SEIS Project Study Areas and Study Corridors.
Pink: R-ROPA/Truck Route, Blue: Blackwater Avoidance Alternative 2 (Northern Route)

And a bona fide EIS requires comparison of alternatives.

Obviously, the DOH didn’t want to go through that again. However, a large portion of the affected public has been calling for a better alternative to bypass Thomas to the north rather than cut between Thomas and Davis and avoid the Blackwater Canyon, the National Forest land there, and the Blackwater

Historic District.

The first opportunity the public had to see revised plans for the project came at an “informational workshop” in August 2019. But there was only one option. Public dismay came through in written comments: 119 supported a northern alignment, two supported

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An Opportunity to Meet the Moment

By Marilyn Cuonzo

Editor’s note: In early February, members of WVHC, as part of the Go North Corridor H Alliance, met with officials from the Monongahela National Forest to share concerns about impacts to the National Forest from Corridor H construction. I felt moved to share the opening address, which was so thoughtfully delivered by Marilyn Cuonzo, with readers of the Voice.

It was 1891 when President Benjamin Harrison created the “Forest Reserves” in response to public concern that unrestrained logging across the country had created severe deforestation

that ushered in a crisis threatening its wildlife, timber and water supplies. The “Forest Reserve” led the way to the creation of the United States Forest Service to manage the long-term conservation of resources for public benefit.

Imagine this: In 1700 there were approximately 65 million bison in what is now called the United States. By the mid 1800’s it is estimated that there were between 30 to 60 million bison. By 1891, the population had been reduced to less than 1,000.

There’s a new crisis today—which has been recognized as climate

change—and when President Joe Biden took office in 2021, he created a conservation goal the “America the Beautiful” initiative, which call on federal agencies to take ambitious conservation action that will reverse biodiversity loss, improve access to nature and grow our natural carbon sink. Included in this mandate is a national goal to conserve 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.

The America the Beautiful initiative is expansive and gives the US Forest Service a rare opportunity to play an important and distinct role in tackling climate change.

It also gives the US Forest Service

the opportunity in this complicated construction of a four-lane highway to apply the America the Beautiful standards that will do the least amount of damage to the environment, wildlife, water, and recreational areas many of us enjoy and have loved for most of our lives.

The loss of natural areas calls for urgent action. The US Forest Service has an opportunity to meet the moment and play an important and distinct role in tackling climate change when considering the impact a four-lane highway will have on such an ecologically sensitive area.

CORRIDOR H HIGHWAY

R-ROPA is Just Lipstick on a Pig... *Plus Trail Troubles*

By Matt Marcus

In March 1997, the West Virginia Division of Highways (DOH) and Michael Baker International presented a “final design” for the Elkins to the Virginia State Line sections of Corridor H. Although this was intended to be a final alignment, since 1997, there have been major economic and traffic pattern changes in Tucker County and changes to the Corridor H highway alignment itself.

For example, instead of the highway going through Hambleton, Parsons, Corrick's Ford, crossing the Black Fork River and going up the Shavers Fork River Valley, Corridor H was rerouted downstream across Holly Meadows and the Cheat River north of Parsons.

This section between Kerens and Parsons is currently being constructed, and it involves an entirely different route from the original. Changes and improvements to the highway design resulted in rerouting over 15 miles of road. Major design changes to Corridor H construction in Tucker County have already been employed to avoid sensitive and historic areas.

What is going on now

Tucker County residents, visitors and businesses are now calling for changes to the old design of the Parsons to Davis section of Corridor H. The alignment now being considered as an alternative to the old plan is called the Blackwater Avoidance Alternative 2 (BAA2). BAA2 is often referred to as the northern route because it loops north of Thomas, negating the need for a Thomas bypass.

What's wrong with the DOH's preferred route (R-ROPA)

The old alignment that is constantly being changed is called the Refined-Revised Original Preferred Alternative (R-ROPA). Even after being tweaked again in 2023, R-ROPA is



The 331-mile Allegheny Trail is one of four trails to be crossed by Corridor H through Tucker County.

still outdated and threatens to split the towns of Davis and Thomas, create worse traffic flow issues, and require a bypass, which will completely surround Thomas with busy highways.

Impacts to towns, historic sites, Blackwater Falls State Park, National Forest, and major interstate and international trail routes still exist with the R-ROPA alignment. The highway would also impact major interstate and international trail routes at a higher rate if the R-ROPA alignment were to be constructed.

The short segment of West Virginia Route 32 between Thomas and Davis will remain a “choke point” between the towns under R-ROPA. This continues to be a design flaw that funnels all north-south traffic travelling to and from Thomas and Route 219 north through this two-lane road.

Additionally, the Route 32 Truck Route/Thomas bypass—a feature unique to R-ROPA—will require all northbound traffic going into Thomas from Corridor H, Davis, and Canaan Valley to take an on-grade left turn across the high-speed truck route at either end of town.

With BAA2 there will be three

separate exits for Davis, Thomas, and Benbush instead of just one under R-ROPA. This would give many alternative routes for traffic and not funnel all north-south traffic through a Route 32 “choke point” between the towns. It would also eliminate the need for a truck bypass.

What are the effects on recreational trails?

Currently, all traffic—including bicycles and pedestrians—between Canaan Valley, Davis and Corridor H going to and from Thomas are currently forced onto a busy narrow two-mile two-lane stretch of Route 32. This situation would continue with R-ROPA regarding motor vehicle traffic flow.

The following trails are all currently routed on Route 32 between the towns of Thomas and Davis.

The **331-mile Allegheny Trail** travels north-south on roads and hiking trails through West Virginia from the Mason Dixon Line near Bruceton Mills to the Virginia State line at Peters Mountain where it intersects the Appalachian Trail.

On the Allegheny Trail there are three trail crossings of Corridor H on

the old R-ROPA route plan, and only one affected by the new BAA2 Northern route.

The **Allegheny Highlands Trail** (AHT), an old Western Maryland Railroad line, is split into two sections. One section is 35 miles from Thomas to Elkins via the Blackwater Canyon railroad grade. The eastern section is open for 5.5 miles outside of Davis heading east toward the planned terminus at Bismarck 12 miles away.

Unfortunately, after years of being told this section of trail was going to be completed to Bismarck, the DOH has informed Tucker Countians that this section won't be built. It was replaced with the shoulder of Corridor H which DOH engineers consider a Bike Route.

Another proposed section of the Allegheny Highlands Trail will link the two existing sections together via the Francis Grade between Davis and Thomas. This section appears as a trail on Western Pocahontas Property future development maps and would be an incredible addition to Tucker County's rail-trail system.

Corridor H would cross the Allegheny Highlands Trail six times with the R-ROPA plan and only four with the BAA2 route.

The **5,057-mile long American Discovery Trail** runs through Davis and Thomas coast to coast from Cape Henlopen, Delaware to Point Reyes, California. Four Corridor H crossings with R-ROPA, and only two with BAA2.

The **5,950-mile Eastern Divide Trail** (EDT) runs north south from the eastern most point in North America at Cape Spear, Newfoundland, Canada to Key West, Florida. The EDT is the longest contiguous off road centric trail in the world with 68% unpaved and over 315,000 ft. elevation gain.

The Eastern Divide Trail would have three Corridor H crossings with R-ROPA and only one with BAA2.

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CORRIDOR H HIGHWAY

Not the Same Old Song *continued from page 8*

the Revised Original Preferred Alignment (ROPA). The agency responded: take it or leave it, we don't have the time to consider any other route; those Go North folks really want to stop the project entirely. With more people paying attention, the next "informational workshop" in September 2022 drew more written comments: 355 for a northern route and 62 for ROPA.

A year later (see the September 2023 issue of the Voice), we learned that the Supplemental EIS would, after all, include a Blackwater Avoidance Alternative option. At the most recent "informational workshop," it was clear that the DOH is still not happy about it. Jason Foster, the chief engineer on the project, told us, "You went to the feds,

and the feds came to us and told us to re-examine the northern alignment. It's your route."

We hope he meant that in a general way. "Our route," after all, is merely a sketch of how Alternative 1D from the first alignment selection process (2003-2004) could be adapted to avoid an enlarged landfill and the Thomas City Park and to merge with the ROPA before descending Backbone Mountain. You can see the sketch on the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance website at abralliance.org. Click on "[Parsons to Davis](#)" and scroll down to "[View the interactive Map](#)."

What the DOH has shown so far looks like a literal translation of our sketch into a 1,500-foot-wide study cor-

ridor. Now, it's called Blackwater Avoidance Alternative 2 (BAA2). If there's not much room for difference on the north, given the landfill, the park, and the Thomas water supply, that is not true at all to the west. There could be many ways to complete the bypass and find a way down the mountain toward Parsons. Why use an exact copy of our cartoon?

The simple point we were making was that Alternative 1D's western section was an unnecessary detour. It traversed steep terrain, crossed high-quality streams, required extra bridges, and lacked a convenient exit to the high school—for no good reason. When the DOH compared alternative 1D to their ROPA, most of its problems were

on that extension. It looked as if it had been designed to fail.

We can't let that happen now. In our comments on the NOI, we call for an improved northern route. Only that will enable fair comparison, comply with environmental law, and result in a better project.

In recent years, the DOH has improved its Original Preferred Alignment to a Revised ROPA and now a refined ROPA. For example, it drastically reduced estimates of required earth-moving to make it comparable to Alternative 1D, while making no changes whatsoever to the latter. Now, it must play catch up. It isn't locked into "our" study corridor. **Let's make it the best possible Corridor H.**

R-ROPA is Just Lipstick on a Pig *continued from page 8*

The annual **Gravel Race Up Spruce Knob** (GRUSK) attracts hundreds of participants every July. There are two routes which utilize Route 32 between the towns. The 220- and 262-mile courses are run both multi-day and non-stop straight through which brings many riders onto Route 32 on a Friday night.

GRUSK would cross Corridor H twice with R-ROPA and none with BAA2. All of the above routes currently on Route 32 could all be routed off the road onto the trail between the towns endorsed by the Tucker County Commission.

Tucker County suggests a solution

Because of the many issues already caused by the funneling of all traffic between the towns, the Tucker County Commission recently unanimously adopted a Resolution to allow the DOH to build a separate pedestrian and bicycle trail paralleling Route 32 between Thomas and Davis.

This trail will enhance public safety, public health, community con-

nection, traffic reduction, economic development and quality of life. Additionally, this trail will provide a separate pathway for four interstate and international trail routes.

The need for a multi-use trail between the towns is obvious. It's a no brainer and a win-win for everyone. Tucker County Commissioner Fred Davis even called it the "Get the bikes off the road" resolution. Concern for public safety was a huge factor in the Commission adopting this resolution.

Politics get in the way

Despite all of the above, there is continued pressure from developers and powerful figures to keep the original outdated alignment of R-ROPA. There have been recent changes made to try to address some objections to the R-ROPA, but the big problems remain. **The refinements and revisions are just lipstick on a pig.**

As recently as September 2023, DOH engineer Travis Long indicated that the plan for this trail was only being considered in concert with the old,

outdated R-ROPA alignment of Corridor H.

The possibility that the DOH is trying to use the planning for the construction of the bicycle/pedestrian trail as leverage for their outdated R-ROPA alignment is shameful. Even if BAA2 is constructed, traffic on Route 32 between the towns will only continue to increase, even without the long-haul truck component that exists now.

Pressure for choosing R-ROPA is possibly coming down from the landowner, Western Pocahontas Properties, who will be majorly impacted by the northern route. They may want to keep the old route to retain and promote their previous existing extensive planning.

Western Pocahontas' plan includes a private/gated community adjacent to Blackwater Falls State Park, making the towns of Thomas and Davis into a "Smart City," and building a major hospital project in Davis.

As a resident of Thomas, I can say none of these plans involved any of the locals I know or their desired out-

comes.

The bottom line

My fear is that the completion of Corridor H between Thomas and Davis is like the story of the idiotic death of The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg. R-ROPA is like the knife cutting open and forever dividing our two towns and degrading the small-town outdoor feeling and experiences for residents and visitors.

Two of the primary reasons for constructing the highway, besides being an east-west long-haul truck route, are to improve the local economy and the quality of life for our residents and visitors.

If Corridor H construction and R-ROPA alignment are going to divide our towns and degrade one of the premier natural areas in West Virginia, the State will fail to achieve the maximum resource potential of either of these lofty economic and quality of life objectives.

Matt Marcus is the manager of Blackwater Bikes and board member of the Blackwater Bicycle Association.

Farewell to a Force of Nature: Angie Rosser's Next Adventure

By Cindy Ellis

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy would like to extend a very fond and sincere farewell to a long-time partner and ally, Angie Rosser. Leaving as the Executive Director of the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Angie will be accepting a position with the National Wildlife Federation.

For over two decades, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Angie, with the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, have enjoyed working, playing, and learning together. This personable, capable, and hard-working individual contributed a great deal. She has a gift for well-chosen words—both spoken and written—and a strong sense of diplomacy coupled with persistence. This has held up even as we have toiled during the fracking boom, the water crisis and more.

When giving her an award, The

River Network cited her talents within our state's "challenging political climates." We also know that she has a deep consideration for the hurdles women face in environmental work.

One mentor to Angie in her early years of lobbying the West Virginia legislature was the Conservancy's Board Member Don Garvin. She said, "West Virginia is a better place because of Don Garvin. Our rivers and streams stand a better chance because of him."

Autumn Crowe will keep the West Virginia Rivers Coalition in good hands when stepping up to serve as interim executive director.

As recently as our Fall Review, Angie was with us in person. She presented a legislative update. One recap of the event noted, "She delivered an uplifting and inspiring presentation on the power of collective action..."

Goodbye, Angie Rosser, and



Good Luck! May you always have a chance to, as one of your favorite tunes says, "Listen to the river sing sweet songs to rock my soul!"

Here is a link to a great podcast interview of Ms. Rosser, "What's in

the Water: West Virginia's WaterKeeper on the Future of Appalachia's Rivers" shows.acast.com/hope-is-my-middle-name

The Sticky World of Sticktights

By Patricia Gundrum

Walking through woods and fields the past few months, one may encounter several types of persistent stick tights. Sticktights refer to plant seeds that come in many shapes and sizes, comprise numerous plant families and stick tenaciously to clothing, shoes and animal fur. A few local examples include:

Both *Hackelia virginiana* (beggar's lice) and *Cynoglossum officinale* (houndstongue) are members of the Boraginaceae, commonly known as the forget-me-not or borage family. These biennial plants produce petite blue flowers. However, these flowers give rise to stick tight seeds that are notoriously difficult to remove from clothing and animal fur.

Agrimonia sp. has small yellow

flowers and is a member of the Rosaceae. The fruits look like small spinning tops with tiny hooks.

Desmodium sp. contains numerous species and is a vining member of the Leguminosae (bean) family. The chains of flattened triangular fruits are produced from pink flowers. Commonly known as tick trefoils, the seeds have a rough texture that adheres to clothing.

Bidens sp. are known as beggars ticks or Spanish needles in the Asteraceae family. The elongated seed have needle like bristles that grab onto fabric and hair.

Sanicula canadensis (black snake-root) is a member of the Apiaceae family and produces bur-like fruit which splits into two seeds.

Arctium minus's common name is burdock. This biennial in the Asteraceae family is the original inspiration for the ultimate invention of Velcro.



Carbon Capture and Storage

A Solution for Climate Change?

By John McFerrin

Things are moving into place for West Virginia to go headlong into what is called carbon capture and storage. Before we dive in completely, it would be useful to consider more carefully the technology, its potential benefits and deficiencies.

Carbon capture and storage is a general term that refers to collecting carbon dioxide from some industrial application and using it for some other purpose or storing it deep underground. In theory, at least, it is a better alternative than releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, where it will contribute to global warming.

It could theoretically be used on such things as coal-fired power plants, extending their useful life at a time when concerns about climate change would demand that they be phased out. Right now, however, this may be a gleam in Appalachian Power's (or the West Virginia Coal Association's) eye, but nobody has made any public proposals. There may never be any.

The more immediate proposals—ones that are barreling down the track right now—are those from Mountaineer Gigasystems and the larger Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2), known as the hydrogen hub. Mountaineer Gigasystems is a complex proposed for Point Pleasant that would use hydrogen for various purposes. It is well on its way, spurred on by a 25 million dollar grant (the euphemism is “forgivable loan”) from the state of West Virginia.

The Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub is not a single facility but a series of about fifteen facilities scattered around West Virginia and adjoining states. What these facilities all have in common is that they involve the use or production of hydrogen as a fuel

or raw material for other manufacturing. It is supported by grants from the United States Department of Energy.

Meanwhile, over in the Legislature, the trains are running. During its 2023 session, it passed a law allowing carbon dioxide to be stored beneath many of West Virginia's public lands. The 2024 session is considering legislation that would pave the way for West Virginia to grant approval for the wells to inject carbon dioxide into the ground. Currently, the United States Environmental Protection Agency has that authority.

In a nutshell, West Virginia is all in on hydrogen. Whether this is a good idea depends upon West Virginia's faith (and at this point, it is faith) that carbon capture and storage works.

Explaining some jargon

While hydrogen is an extremely common element, it does not exist in a pure form in nature. It is always bound up with something. If it is bound up with oxygen, it makes water. If it is bound up with carbon, it makes methane. It is also found in coal. To get hydrogen that we can use, we have to split it from whatever it is bound up with.

Current jargon labels methods used to isolate the hydrogen by colors. If hydrogen is isolated from coal or methane and the carbon dioxide is released to the atmosphere, that is called gray hydrogen. If hydrogen is isolated from methane and the resulting carbon dioxide is captured and stored, that is called blue hydrogen. If hydrogen is separated from water using sustainable sources of energy, that is called green hydrogen.

Both Mountaineer Gigasystems and the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2) plan to use

blue hydrogen. Thus, they will use carbon capture and storage.

Does carbon capture and storage work?

Both the Mountaineer Gigasystems proposal and the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2) depend upon methane, the main component of natural gas. The projects plan to take methane and split it into hydrogen and carbon dioxide. They anticipate using the hydrogen and disposing of the carbon dioxide using carbon capture and storage.

In deciding whether carbon capture and storage works, we have to keep our eyes on the prize. The goal is to end up with a fuel—the hydrogen—which we can use without releasing carbon dioxide, either in the burning of the fuel or its production.

The burning of the hydrogen is the easy part. Burning hydrogen does not release any carbon dioxide. So far, so good.

The difficulties arise in producing the hydrogen and then disposing of the resulting carbon dioxide. A molecule of methane—the main component of natural gas—has four molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of carbon.

If we just burned the methane (as we do now), all that carbon is released to the atmosphere, something we want to avoid in the future. The trick is to split the hydrogen away from the carbon and then get rid of the carbon to some place where it will not contribute to climate change.

If the methane could just somehow jump out of the ground, get to the industrial facility, split itself into carbon and methane, and the carbon jump back in the ground and stay there forever, the problem would be solved. **But it doesn't. At every step, there are problems.**

There are problems with the methane getting to the spot where it will be split without leaking along the way. These were the subject of a previous Highlands Voice article, [see the December 2023 issue](#).

Even assuming the methane does not leak along the way from the well to where it will be split, problems remain. The nearly universal process

for splitting methane into carbon and hydrogen is called steam methane reforming. This involves applying heat and pressure to the methane, causing the carbon molecules to split from the hydrogen molecules.

Generating this heat and pressure is not free; it takes a lot of energy.

Once the split is accomplished, the resulting carbon dioxide must be compressed until it becomes a liquid. More energy. The liquid is then transported to a storage site, generally by pipeline. This will require energy for pumps, compressor stations, etc. With the Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub, the storage is anticipated to be at least 2,500 feet underground. Making that storage space available is what the West Virginia Legislature was up to in 2023 when it authorized selling the space under our public lands for storage of carbon dioxide.

The carbon dioxide does not go down deep underground on its own. Wells must be drilled; the carbon dioxide must be pumped. That takes more energy.

Unless the energy for all these steps comes from unconventional sources (wind, solar, geothermal), producing all that energy will result in the release of carbon dioxide. If, for example, the energy to power the steam methane reforming comes from burning methane, that burning will release carbon dioxide. The same is true of every step in the process (compressing the carbon dioxide, piping it to a storage site, pumping it into the ground). Some of what we have gained by using hydrogen as an energy source instead of methane is lost through the carbon dioxide released in making the hydrogen available.

The problems with the energy costs involved in moving methane, splitting methane into hydrogen and carbon dioxide, moving and storing carbon dioxide would exist even if the process were one hundred percent efficient. But it isn't. Very few operating facilities split methane into hydrogen and carbon dioxide and then capture the carbon dioxide. The ones that do this process report rates of carbon di-

continued on next page

Carbon Capture and Storage

continued from previous page

oxide capture of between 53% and 90%.

The Bottom Line

The stated goal of blue hydrogen production and use is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To answer this question, engineers at Cornell University looked at the blue hydrogen process and compared it with other sources of energy. Here is what they found:

“Perhaps surprisingly, the greenhouse gas footprint of blue hydrogen is more than 20% greater than that of burning natural gas or coal for heat and some 60% greater than that of burning diesel oil for heat, again with our default assumptions.”

They reached this conclusion without considering the energy costs

of transporting the carbon dioxide to the storage site and pumping it underground. Were they to consider those energy costs, the comparison to coal, natural gas, or diesel oil would be even less favorable to blue hydrogen.

This assumes, of course, current technology and practice. Maybe the oil and gas industry will figure out a way to stop all leaks. Maybe someone will figure out a way to make the separating technology more efficient. Maybe someone will figure out how to make every step less energy-intensive. **Right now, however, blue hydrogen is not part of the solution to the problem of climate change.**

The Rest of the Story (including the other side)

Much of the information for this story came from Robert Howarth and Mark Jacobson: ***How Green Is Blue Hydrogen?*** published in the journal *Energy Science and Engineering* (2021).

To read the whole thing, go to <https://bit.ly/3wwWgPp>. It gets pretty nerdy at times (chemical formulas and such) but on the whole it is easy enough for an ordinary human to understand and is recommended for anyone who wants a better understanding of the science of this issue.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. In its 2022 report, it had a much more sanguine view of carbon capture than professors Howarth and Jacobson and suggested that it could be part of the solution to climate change.

Opposition to Mountain Valley Pipeline *continued from page 6*



Maury Johnson at the United Nations Climate Week in New York City.

must also be said that they are too few and far between.

MVP might pay a small fine, but those fines most likely will not be significant enough to stop them or other companies from just doing whatever they want. My overall assessment is that neither state environmental protection agencies are doing much to protect our fragile mountain streams

and other water resources from being degraded and even destroyed along the path of the pipeline.

It appears that the Virginia DEQ is doing far less, if anything at all, to protect their high-quality streams, such as Bottom Creek, Sinking Creek, and Big Stony Creek, to name just three of the hundreds of streams being severely impacted by the construction of the MVP across Virginia. More about these impacts can be read on the Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights website powhr.org

Another notable lawsuit involving the MVP was filed to overturn the use of the eminent domain for private gain in the case filed in early 2020, Cletus Bohon et al. v. FERC et al. No. 20-5203. The landowners are Cletus and Beverly Bohon of Montgomery County, Virginia, Wendell and Mary Flora of Franklin County, Virginia, and Aimee and Matt Hamm of Bent Mountain, Virginia.

For more information on this case, you can visit yugocollins.com.

You can also learn how to support this lawsuit by contacting facebook.com/preservemonroe.

Finally, in late February, the group 7 Directions of Service filed a Human Rights Complaint to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The press release can be found here <https://bit.ly/3uR1MvZ>

As you can see, the resistance to the MVP is still strong and is gathering momentum as time goes on. Meanwhile, the MVP has recently filed a report with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission admitting they misled them and the American people when they stated in April of 2023 that the pipeline would be in service in late 2023.

More recently, they stated the pipeline would not be completed until late in 2024. When it was first announced, the developers said the pipeline would cost around \$3.7 billion and be completed by the end of 2018. With

this most recent press release, they have extended their possible completion date again and **raised the cost to a staggering \$7.3 billion.**

Just like in the Star Wars Trilogy, the Dark Side's (MVP) victory is far from guaranteed, and the resistance continues as more and more people wake up to Truth. To join the resistance contact POWHR at powhr.org/get-involved/ or Mariah Clay at mclay@wvivers.org

Maury Johnson is a West Virginia Landowner, on the Board of Directors of Preserve Monroe, and one of five recipients of the Community Sentinel Award for 2023, awarded to him for his service to his community, region, and the nation.

Editor's note: WVHC has reached out to The Appalachian Trail Conservancy to extend an opportunity to comment on the Stewardship Trail Agreement with Mountain Valley Pipeline, LLC.

Big Results, Big Plans for Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards

By Dave Johnston

For the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards, winter is a chance to reflect on what we have accomplished and what we have learned from the previous year's engagement. It's also a chance to lay plans for the upcoming season.

Through the generous contribution of time and resources by scores of volunteers, we have built a movement that has gained the respect of the Forest Service and become recognized throughout West Virginia and beyond. Wilderness Stewards contributed more than 2,200 volunteer hours during the past fiscal year, which is remarkable for any local volunteer organization, especially one as young as we are.

But most importantly, we are beginning to make a real difference for Dolly Sods: visitors are more tuned in to the unique nature of wilderness and the Leave No Trace principles. They are more mindful of applying low-impact practices during their visit. We have been

able to make valuable observations about the number of visitors, the opportunity for wilderness solitude, campsite and trail conditions, and the status of natural features of Dolly Sods, and report them to the Forest Service so they can better manage the area. In short, we are actively and effectively supporting the wilderness character of Dolly Sods.

That's certainly not to say that the job is finished. Visitation statistics from the trailhead registers suggest that even after the pandemic, the popularity of Dolly Sods has not slacked off. In fact, the registration data indicates that overall visitation may have increased by around 15% from 2022 to 2023. Increased use of the wilderness, even by well-intentioned visitors, inevitably results in a more significant impact and challenge to the wilderness character.

So, the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards will be doubling down on our activities in support of Dolly Sods in the coming year. Following

is a review of the training and opportunities for field projects we will be launching this spring and summer.

Some of these are a continuation of what we've been doing for three years, while others are expanded to have even more positive impact, and some are brand new opportunities. Also, check the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy website for updates and further information.

If you would like to be included on a list to be notified about further information for any of these programs or events, sign up for the Wilderness Stewards on the Conservancy website or send an email to dollysodsstewards@gmail.com.

Trailhead Stewards: Training for New and Current Stewards, May 18 at Seneca Rocks Discovery Center

The Trailhead Stewards are our signature program and have helped thousands of visitors have a successful, low-impact experience

of Dolly Sods. We are well on our way to having the busiest trailheads staffed with volunteer Stewards during weekends and holidays. We can always use new volunteers who enjoy interacting with visitors and sharing advice on routes, what to expect and how to Leave No Trace in our special wilderness.

Guided Hikes, just for Stewards: Last year, we started offering special day hike for continuing education and experience in certain areas of Dolly Sods. The hikes are led by Dolly Sods "veterans" and naturalists, and provide an opportunity to learn more about the natural history and features of the wilderness, and we do a little trail and campsite cleanup along the way. These were popular, and we will be expanding them during the coming season.

Annual all-Stewards Picnic: May 18 at Seneca Rocks Picnic Pavilion

Held right after the Trailhead Stewards training, all Dolly Sods

continued on next page



Become a Dolly Sods Wilderness Steward!

Sign up today at bit.ly/DollySodsWildernessStewards

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.

Big Results, Big Plans for Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards

Wilderness Stewards are invited to share their experiences, meet other Stewards, and get recognition for all they have done to support Dolly Sods. Food and beverages are provided, and we are working on a program for entertainment and learning.

Crosscut Sawyer Team Training: April 13-14 at Seneca Rocks and in the field

Last year, we formed a Cross-cut Sawyer team, and new members are welcome! Sawyers clear trails and campsites of fallen trees, brush and vegetation using traditional, non-power tools compatible with the wilderness. We hold scheduled projects through the spring and summer in Dolly Sods and other nearby wilderness areas. The full weekend training covers the planning and tactics, safety, tools, and techniques for bucking trees and includes a full day of practice in the

field, leading to certification as an A or B Sawyer. Basic first aid and CPR are required, and the Forest Service can provide training.

Trail Maintenance Team Training: April 27-28 at Seneca Rocks and in the field

We formed this team last year, and new members are welcome! The trails in Dolly Sods are challenging and purposely primitive, but they need a lot of work to protect the wilderness environment by keeping water off the trail and people on the trail! We use various tools and specialized techniques to make the trails compatible with wilderness. Scheduled projects are held through the spring and summer. The weekend training includes classroom instruction on tools, methods, and safety and a day of fieldwork. Here's your chance to make a positive difference for the Dolly Sods trails.

Solitude Monitoring: Online training to be held in early May

One of the primary values of wilderness is an “opportunity for solitude,” and the status of this needs to be periodically monitored. Volunteer Stewards hike specified trails for four hours and record the number of groups, individuals and dogs or horses encountered. The information is used by the Forest Service to develop plans for visitor use management of the wilderness. Training is an approximately one-hour online session, and our monitoring period will be from mid-May through June. This is one of our most popular activities, and we would welcome new volunteers.

Backcountry Stewards

This brand-new program is under development and is targeted to kick off in the early summer of 2024. Building on the success of the

Trailhead Stewards, Backcountry Stewards will take the messages of a low-impact wilderness experience, Leave No Trace practices, and advice on how to have a safe and enjoyable visit into the “interior.”

Stewards will also monitor and report trail and campsite conditions, do maintenance and cleanup, and assist with emergencies and other incidents in the field. Backcountry Stewards will be selectively prequalified and screened and given extensive training. We will start with a small group, but we plan to have a path toward becoming a certified Backcountry Steward, so expressions of interest in getting involved as we grow are welcome and encouraged.

The best way to be sure you see further updates as these programs develop (and on anything new we might come up with) is to add yourself to the [Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards](#) on the WVHC website.

BECOME A MEMBER

Name_____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Membership categories (circle one)

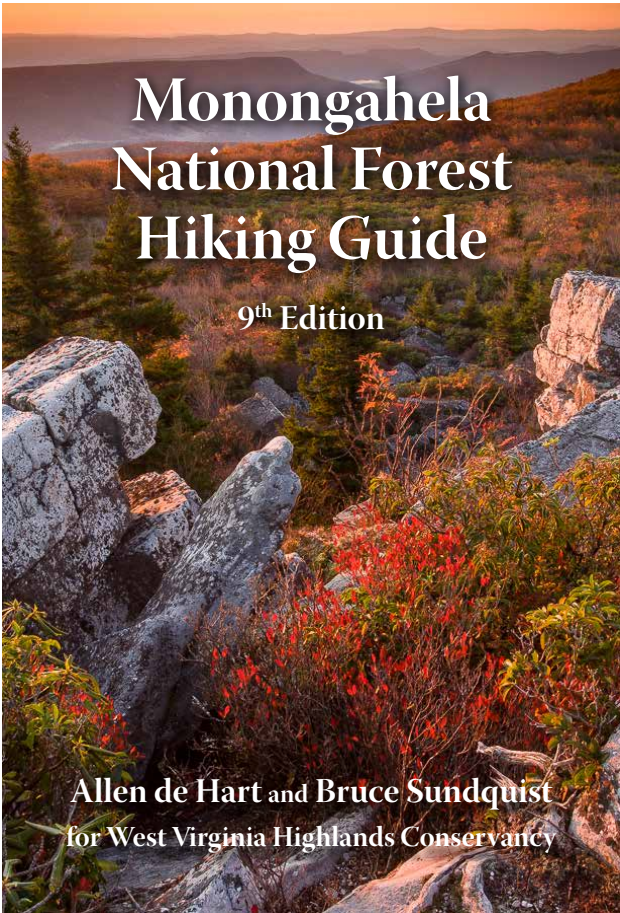
	Individual	Family	Org.
Senior	\$15		
Student	\$15		
Introductory	\$15		
Other	\$15		
Regular	\$25	\$35	\$50
Associate	\$50	\$75	\$100
Sustaining	\$100	\$150	\$200
Patron	\$250	\$500	\$500
Mountaineer	\$500	\$750	\$1000

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 online at www.wvhighlands.org

Hit the trails with our 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**

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