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The Highlands Voice

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Nationwide uprising stops two attempts to sell off public lands

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Over the past two months, public lands advocates from across the country have fought back two separate attempts by Congress to sell off millions of acres of public lands in the Western United States.

It started late on May 6, 2025, when the House Natural Resources Committee slipped in a surprise amendment during their marathon markup of the 2025 budget reconciliation. Reps. Mark Amodei (R-Nevada) and Celeste Maloy (R-Utah) introduced language that would have forced the sale of at least 500,000 acres of public lands in Nevada and more than 11,000 acres in Utah.

This amendment had no safeguards for public use or any restrictions on what could happen after the land was sold. Imagine luxury



Dolly Sods Wilderness Area (Photo by Luke Chen/Getty Images)

resorts, strip malls, or worse, open-pit mining on lands that belong to all of us. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy joined more than 100 organizations nationwide to demand congressional leaders toss out the amendment. After intense public pressure, the House pulled the language on May 21.

But the relief was short-lived. On June 3, the Senate took another

swing at selling our public lands. Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chair Mike Lee (R-Utah) introduced his own proposal, ordering the sale of up to three million acres across eleven Western states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming, with Senator Jim Justice from West Virginia serving as a member

of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Once again, WVHC and more than a hundred other organizations pushed back, urging Senate leadership to abandon this unprecedented sell-off.

WVHC believes it's crucial to defend public lands nationwide because these lands represent our shared heritage, providing essential ecological benefits, safeguarding biodiversity, and offering recreation opportunities that sustain rural economies and communities. There is no doubt that selling off public lands in the west opens up the door for more public lands sales across the country.

The Senate parliamentarian ultimately ruled that Sen. Lee's measure violated the Byrd Rule—a critical check authored by West Vir-

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Nationwide uprising stops two attempts to sell off public lands

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ginia's own Senator Robert Byrd in 1990. The Byrd Rule prevents unrelated provisions like these from being crammed into budget reconciliation bills.

That didn't stop Sen. Lee, though, who vowed publicly to keep trying, citing affordable housing as his rationale. On June 26, Lee submitted a revised version, still targeting between 1.05 and 2.1 million acres of public lands. This time, the language focused on lands within five miles of a vaguely defined "population center," potentially including towns as small as 2,500 residents.

After another round of fierce opposition, at nearly 9:30 p.m. on June 28, Sen. Lee withdrew the proposal entirely, saying in a social media statement, "Over the past several weeks, I've spent a lot of time listening to members of the community, local leaders, and stakeholders across the country. While there has been a tremendous amount of misinformation—and in some cases, outright lies—about my bill, many brought forward sincere concerns."

For many Conservancy members, this fight feels like a rerun. Congress has been flirting with the idea of turning public lands into private property for decades, always following a similar script: call the land "surplus" or "mismanaged," promise jobs or cheaper housing, and hope nobody notices. Fortunately, for our forests, rivers, and wildlife, somebody always does. I've

personally experienced the magic of public lands not just here at home in West Virginia, but also during the years I lived and explored in California and Idaho. Those experiences have shaped who I am today, teaching me firsthand how important it is to preserve these landscapes—not just for ourselves, but for future generations.

A quick stroll through past public-land auctions:

1981: Reagan's Interior Secretary James Watt tried to sell off 35 million acres—five percent of all federal lands—to pay down the deficit. Western governors, hunters, and local governments revolted, stopping the proposal cold.

2005: A midnight rider quietly slipped into a House budget bill would have opened the door for companies to buy mining claims on up to 350 million acres. Anglers, hunters, and even county sheriffs called it the biggest land grab since the railroad days, and the Senate ultimately rejected it.

2017: Utah Congressman Jason Chaffetz attempted to sell off 3.3 million acres of public lands identified as "eligible for disposal." A nationwide #KeepItPublic backlash convinced him to withdraw the bill after just one week.

As the budget bill heads back to the House for another review, the WVHC and its allies will be watching closely. We know these bad ideas rarely disappear completely—they just hibernate, waiting for another chance.

But as long as Congress keeps trying to hang "for sale" signs on our public lands, WVHC will keep standing up and pulling them down.

See you on the trail.

Save the Date for WVHC's 2025 Fall Review: "Environmentalism in a Changing World"

As Appalachia faces escalating environmental threats—from policy rollbacks and extreme weather to industrial development and habitat loss—this fall, conservationists, advocates, and concerned citizens will gather in the heart of Tucker County for a critical weekend of reflection, strategy and action.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's annual Fall Review returns to **Blackwater Falls State Park** the weekend of **Oct. 31–Nov. 2**, convening some of the region's most trusted voices to examine how we can defend Appalachia's lands, waters, and communities in the face of profound change.

With political landscapes shifting and climate impacts intensifying, the Fall Review will explore how we respond—through policy, advocacy, and grassroots action—to ensure a just and resilient future for the Mountain State and beyond.

We'll be announcing a very special keynote speaker soon, but in the meantime, panel sessions will feature environmental leaders, attorneys, scientists, and advocates, including:

Federal Policy and Appalachia – a look at national policies shaping the region's future—from climate legislation to conservation funding with experts from local, regional and national environmental organizations.

West Virginia's Legislative Landscape – an insider's view of the most pressing state-level policy battles, featuring voices from the WV Rivers Coalition, the West Virginia Environmental Council, and

other key advocates.

Citizen Advocacy 101 – a hands-on session to empower attendees to speak up and organize effectively in their communities.

Looking Back, Moving Forward – a tribute and knowledge-sharing panel with veteran environmental champions, offering lessons from past struggles and hopes for the future.

Outdoor Adventures and Connection – it wouldn't be a WVHC event without going outside. Attendees can look forward to:

- A guided hike on Saturday
- A nighttime nature walk and sound-listening session
- A peaceful Sunday birding excursion

Why It Matters – from defending public lands to confronting polluting development and climate-driven disasters, Appalachia needs engaged citizens now more than ever.

This year's Fall Review isn't just a conference—it's a call to action. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or new to the movement, this gathering offers the knowledge, tools, and relationships to make a difference.

Registration opens soon. Don't miss this opportunity to learn, connect, and help shape the next chapter of West Virginia's environmental movement.

This event was made possible with the generous support of the American Water Charitable Foundation.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy brings Appalachia's fight to Capitol Hill

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Earlier in June, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy traveled to Capitol Hill with our friends at the Alliance for Appalachia, determined to speak truth to power and demand a better, healthier future for our communities. We spent a week walking through congressional offices, sharing stories and struggles from Appalachia, and reminding lawmakers what's truly at stake.

The Alliance for Appalachia is a coalition of 18 member organizations who works to fight the devastating impacts of resource extraction and push for genuine change across our region. It was energizing to stand side by side with activists who live these battles every day.

One unforgettable highlight was hearing from members of the Appalachian Rekindling Project, an Indigenous, woman-led collective. In eastern Kentucky, they're reclaiming and restoring land devastated by mountaintop removal mining, building a space where Indigenous communities can gather, heal, and reconnect. Recently, they bought 63 acres within the boundaries of a proposed federal prison site (the Letch-



er County Prison)—taking back land marked for incarceration and destruction and instead creating a place of renewal. This year, they'll rewild the land with native plants and animals, including bison, turning scars of extraction into symbols of resilience. We joined their call urging legislators to halt federal funds for the prison and support community-centered alternatives instead.

Throughout the week, our coalition pushed Congress to take meaningful action on multiple critical fronts:

We urged lawmakers to cospon-

sor the **Environmental Justice for All Act**, a bill designed to protect communities long burdened by pollution and environmental neglect. Appalachia has suffered deeply from coal extraction and related health crises, and this Act would strengthen protections, boost funding, and give communities a stronger voice in environmental decisions.

We advocated for the **Appalachian Communities Health Equity (ACHE) Act**, which would put a moratorium on mountaintop removal permits until a comprehensive federal health study is conducted. Mountaintop removal mining has been directly linked to disproportionately high rates of cancer, lung disease, and chronic illness in coalfield communities—especially in West Virginia.

We also championed the **Zombie Mine Prevention Package**, a group of bills addressing dangerous abandoned mines that continue harming Appalachia with polluted water, flooding, and environmental degradation. These bills would hold coal companies accountable, ensuring proper cleanup and lasting community protection.

We met with staffers from Senator Justice, Senator Capito, Repre-

sentative Moore, and Representative Miller, pressing them to safeguard our cherished public lands. We urged them to oppose any attempts to sell off public lands and instead support the **Public Lands in Public Hands Act of 2025**. This act, introduced by Rep. Gabe Vasquez of New Mexico, would require Congressional approval for significant transfers of public lands, ensuring these critical natural resources remain protected for future generations.

Additionally, we highlighted urgent threats from recent executive orders that could open national forests, like our beloved Monongahela National Forest, to increased mining and logging. The Monongahela provides clean water, wildlife habitat, and sustains a thriving outdoor economy. We made it clear—these forests must be protected, not exploited.

One of the most sobering discussions centered around the water crisis gripping West Virginia's southern coalfields. Caitlin Ware, co-founder of From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice, showed powerful images to congressional staffers of contaminated, discolored water coming from taps

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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.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Online Store Catalog

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- 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
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- I Love Mountains Toddler T-Shirts. Available in 18-months, 2T, 3T, 4T, 5/6: \$20.00
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Please include \$6.25 shipping for Apparel items

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

Books

- Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide, 9th Edition: \$21.95 + \$5.38 shipping
- Fighting to Protect the Highlands: \$15.95 + \$5.38 shipping
- The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands, 2nd Edition: \$29.95 + \$5.38 shipping

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.



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Thoughts from our President

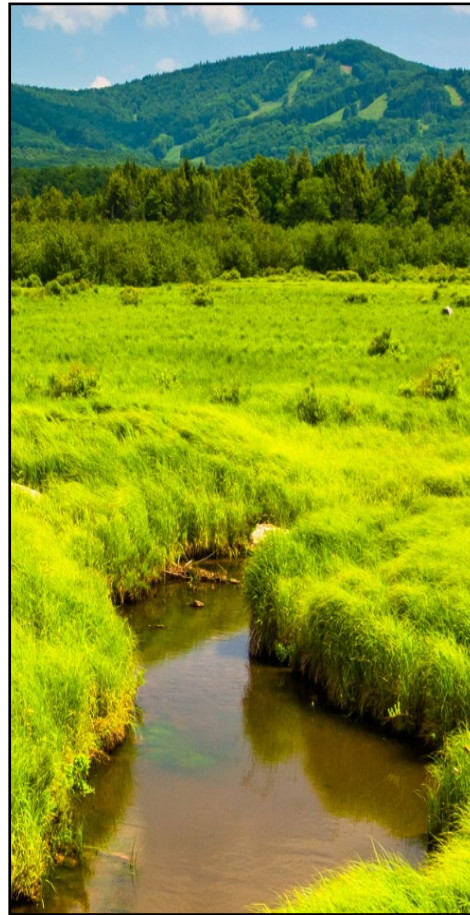
Dear friends of the Highlands,

As I sit down to write this article, my head is whirling, and my thoughts are going in many directions. I have been in the midst of coming up with what to say to convince the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) commissioners to deny the Fundamental Data air quality control permit. The hearing, which took place on June 30, was packed with many speakers. The permit is for a microgrid powered by natural gas and diesel, sited just above the landfill in Davis. It is within a mile of the school, library, and many residences.

As written, the permit does not require any air quality controls or emissions analysis. **The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has opposed this project since it came to light at the end of March.**

The permit is heavily redacted, so much information is not available. The developer did not state the end use of the microgrid in the permit, but was quoted in the Wall Street Journal as saying it would be used to power a very large farm of data centers—reportedly 10,000 acres. We all think this is an incompatible use of land in Tucker County and would pose many health risks for residents. If you agree, **please support us by donating to a fund that is being used to hire air quality specialists and other needed support.** You can go to our website and donate to this cause.

In the area of public lands, we strongly oppose the confusing array of proposals in the United States



Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge Area (Photo by Appalachian Views/Getty Images)

Senate that propose the sale of public lands. The original language for the Big “Beautiful” Bill mandated the sale of millions of acres in western states under the guise of promoting affordable housing. After much pushback, the language was amended but still mandated the sale of public lands.

The Conservancy is totally opposed to any public land being sold. The land belongs to the American people. Any sale of any public lands would set a precedent that could be used in West Virginia. Imagine the Monongahela National Forest becoming a playground for those who could afford to purchase

the land—with no public access for hiking, fishing, or hunting.

On a positive note, two motions that were argued by WVHC and other environmental groups were successful. A federal judge in Delaware ruled Tuesday in favor of two motions filed by conservation groups, allowing key legal and administrative actions to move forward to protect portions of the Monongahela National Forest from mining activities by South Fork Coal Company, despite the company’s bankruptcy proceedings. South Fork Coal Company filed for bankruptcy in February 2025. Congratulations to our Board member who argued the motions.

Our outings program is starting in August—look for information on what and where! It is not too early to put Fall Review on your calendar. It will be held on the weekend of Oct. 31 at Blackwater Falls State Park. There will be presentations on the effects of deregulation, updates on current issues, citizen advocacy, and more, with outdoor activities included. There may even be a Halloween party!

See you in the Highlands,

Marilyn Shoenfeld
President
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Help protect
our community,
land, and future
— donate to our
Data Center
fund.



West Virginia Highlands Conservancy brings Appalachia’s fight to Capitol Hill

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throughout the region. Many residents rely entirely on bottled water or springs, often at significant expense and hardship. We demanded immediate federal action to address this crisis, which has been shamefully overlooked by state and federal leaders for far too long.

With our partners—WV Rivers Coalition, WV Citizens Action Group, Friends of Blackwater, and From Below—we delivered a unified and clear message: West Virginia deserves better.

Returning home from D.C., I feel inspired and grateful for the strength of our collective voices. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with more than 40 Appalachian advocates reaffirmed that our shared commitment to justice, clean water, and a sustainable future is what makes us powerful. As Mother Jones famously said, **“There is no peace in West Virginia because there is no justice in West Virginia.”** We carry her words and determination forward, knowing this fight continues, but also knowing we’re stronger together.

The fight goes on. Learn more about the Alliance for Appalachia and support their work at: theallianceforappalachia.org.

Tucker County data center fight heats up

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Since the last issue of The Highlands Voice, things have moved quickly in the battle against the controversial data center and gas-fired power plant proposed by Fundamental Data in Tucker County. Here's the latest.

On June 19, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) opened Fundamental Data's heavily redacted air quality permit for public comment. The permit seeks to allow construction of a massive 785-megawatt natural gas plant with diesel backup near the towns of Thomas and Davis. This plant would power what the company hopes will become one of the largest data center complexes in the world, sprawling across thousands of acres of pristine highlands.

This proposal has raised widespread alarm. On June 12, the Conservancy, alongside Tucker United and Friends of Blackwater, filed a formal appeal challenging WVDEP's approval of Fundamental Data's confidentiality claims. Initially, the WVDEP questioned the company's claims of "trade secrets," but quickly reversed its stance, allowing critical details to remain hidden from public scrutiny.

A technical review conducted by a member of Tucker United raised serious concerns about Fundamental Data's claim that the plant could operate under a "synthetic minor" permit. This status would require the plant to remain below specific pollution thresholds—but according to the analysis, such operational constraints appear impossible. Simply put, it's unlikely the



Photo from the Thomas City Council meeting in June. Tucker United gave a presentation asking the town to adopt a resolution opposing the Ridgeline Facility. (Photo by Cris Parque)

facility can consistently meet minor-source emission levels while supplying continuous, reliable power to a large-scale data center.

On June 30, WVDEP hosted an in-person public meeting at Canaan Valley Resort, drawing more than 400 community members and lasting six hours, well into the night—an unprecedented turnout. Residents packed the hall, voicing concerns about air quality, water supplies, tourism impacts, public health, and quality of life. Another virtual public hearing is scheduled for July 17 from 6 to 8 p.m., with written comments due by July 18.

In Tucker County, opposition to the project is clear and growing. Yard signs reading "No Data Center Complex in Tucker County" have sprung up county-wide. Tucker United has taken the message directly to local leaders, urging Davis, Thomas, and Parsons town councils to formally oppose the data center complex. So far, Davis has officially adopted a resolution opposing the project, with other towns actively considering similar actions.

The Conservancy, standing

with a broad coalition including Tucker United, Friends of Blackwater, Sierra Club, and Appalachian Mountain Advocates, has launched a fundraising effort to support the ongoing fight. As of this writing, we've raised \$12,531 toward our initial goal of \$50,000. These funds will directly support legal reviews, expert analysis, public outreach, and community mobilization efforts.

The idea of building a fossil fuel power plant solely to serve energy-hungry data centers—particularly during a global climate crisis—is not just irresponsible; it's reckless. Tucker County, known for its clean air, pristine waterways, and outdoor recreation economy, deserves better than trading natural beauty and community health for industrial-scale pollution and uncertain economic benefits.

We encourage everyone who values the integrity of our Highlands to speak up now, submit comments to WVDEP, and help us ensure that transparency and environmental responsibility prevail. The stakes couldn't be higher, but our resolve has never been stronger.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy hosts "Summer Splash" on the Cheat River

Looking for a fun, refreshing way to celebrate summer in the Mountain State? The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy invites paddlers of all experience levels to hit the water for Summer Splash, a scenic 4-mile float down the stunning Cheat River, happening Saturday, August 2, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Hosted in partnership with Blackwater Outdoor Adventures (BOA), this community-focused paddle promises sunshine, river fun, and a chance to connect with fellow nature lovers. Whether you're a seasoned river runner or a curious first-timer, the Summer Splash offers the perfect excuse to get outside and enjoy one of West Virginia's most beautiful waterways.

Thanks to support from the American Water Charitable Foundation, WVHC is offering a limited number of sponsored rentals to help make the event more accessible to local participants.

Date: Saturday, August 2, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Location: Blackwater Outdoor Adventures, 60 Location Rd, Parsons, WV 26287

Spots are limited and expected to fill quickly—register now via the WVHC website to secure your place on the river. Come make a splash with us and experience the wild, wonderful magic of the Highlands!

Priorities, promises, and Corridor H

By Hugh Rogers

Elections have consequences. We have been brutally reminded of that. But what difference will the new administration in Charleston make in what government builds?

In a speech last month, Governor Morrisey promised new priorities for West Virginia's highway system. He claimed to have no other choice. According to Morrisey, "One of the most disappointing things we found when we took office was, despite the billions of dollars that was spent the last eight years on highways and bridges, there was a lot of debt racked up without making the progress that we need."

"We were designing and starting construction on highways all over the state, but we had no way to pay for it... We can't even afford the existing highways that are on the books."

In sum, the Governor said, the Department of Transportation is "basically out of money."

This wasn't the first time the new boss took a swipe at the old boss. But this time, the remedy was different. Not only would the Morrisey administration spend less, but it would also be spent differently.

The limited funds available will be spent on renovation and replacement. "Maintenance is going to come first," Morrisey said.

It sounds straightforward and encouraging to protesters against the last sections of Corridor H. From Parsons to Davis and Wardensville to the Virginia line, current proposals would spend money we don't have and devastate places we trea-



Construction on Corridor H from Kerens to Parsons (Photo by Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance Air Force)

sure.

As part of the Go North Alliance, we have called for a different approach. Address the real need; save the parks, forests, rivers, trails, historic sites and special places that are our heritage and our future in a changing climate. Not to mention they're what we share with visitors.

In Tucker County, the most pressing need is a bypass for Thomas's narrow shopping and entertainment streets. It should be built from the four-lane's current terminus outside Davis to current US 219 west of Thomas. That's the "replacement" part. The rest is "renovation."

In Hardy County, it makes no sense to ram a four-lane through the George Washington National Forest right up to the border. Virginia has declined to build it from there to I-81, its supposed terminus. If the Appalachian Regional Commission, which drew up the develop-

ment highway corridors years ago, were doing its job today, it would halt West Virginia's plan. The Appalachian Regional Commission Code obligates it to "coordinate" neighboring state's projects "with the object of achieving continuity and reasonable uniformity."

It should not be surprising that another Appalachian state has faced the dilemma of a planned highway corridor that turned out to be neither environmentally nor economically sustainable. Corridor K, roughly connecting Asheville, North Carolina, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, offers an example.

According to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), "This project is among the last of the Appalachian Development Highway System's corridors to be completed due to the challenges associated with the region's mountainous terrain and sensitive natural

habitat." Exactly what we could say about Corridor H.

What NCDOT does not say, officially, is what Governor Morrisey has announced: they ran out of money. When that happened, nearly twenty years ago, it led to long and difficult negotiations with local governments, environmental advocacy groups, and other "stakeholders."

Finally, in 2010, NCDOT announced it would consider less-than-four lane alternatives, mostly along existing roads. It "reinitiated studies with a fresh approach." And in 2022, construction began on a 12-mile section. The new design calls for "spot improvements" on US and State highways:

- Improve road alignments of U.S. 129, N.C. 143 and N.C. 28
- The highways will include two 12-foot lanes with 10-foot shoulders.
- Increase shoulder widths and add passing and climbing lanes for the length of the project.

You may imagine that Corridor K must be a "unicorn." I want to assure you that other Appalachian corridors have been built with similar flexibility. Examples include Corridor U in Pennsylvania, Corridor Q in Virginia, and Corridor J in Kentucky. Appalachian Regional Commission's Code allows appropriate changes as long as the corridors achieve a 50-mph design speed "between major System termini"—not mile by mile.

We may not have the money, but we do have the precedents. Let's follow them.

Mountain Valley Pipeline: A year later, unease lingers for these residents

By Curtis Tate, West Virginia Public Broadcasting

Paula Mann and her husband, Herman, live in the middle of Monroe County, in far southern West Virginia.

On their sloped property, they have goats, ducks and chickens. Mann sells her chickens' organic eggs at a farmer's market in Blacksburg, Virginia, about an hour away.

The Manns have lived next to the Mountain Valley Pipeline since it began operating a year ago. The 303-mile high pressure gas pipeline runs from north central West Virginia and southern Virginia. It generated opposition and controversy during six years of construction and court battles.

"Well, it was pretty upsetting because we had, well, during the construction, we had people back and forth and back and forth, the trucks and everything going up and down the road," Paula Mann said. "They tore the road all the pieces, of course, and they scared my animals to death."

Among her lingering concerns: how the project affected their well water. Mann says their water was clean for decades before the pipeline came in.

"Our water got muddy, which it had never done before," she said. "We never had any trouble with it until then, till after they started doing that construction, put that line in there."

Mann says the pipeline company recently took a sample of their well water to test it. They're await-



Paula and Herman Mann live in Monroe County, West Virginia, near the Mountain Valley Pipeline.

ing the results.

The company has repeatedly stated that it followed federal regulations and that the pipeline is safe.

Residents who live near the pipeline, including the Manns, aren't as sure.

"And one of our fears has been that, what if it blows up?" Paula Mann said.

The pipeline crosses a gravel road about a quarter mile from where the Manns live. The 42-inch diameter line passes under the road and up moderate slopes on both sides.

During the long pauses in construction as court battles played out, Mann says sections of green pipe sat exposed to the elements.

"It sat there and it faded," she

said. "We got all kinds of pictures of it, and it was rusty inside and the ends, they had ends on it, but they had fallen off. And some of them didn't have any ends, and it was rusty in there. And of course, there's rusty around where they have to weld them together and all that."

Construction of the pipeline across Monroe County is now the subject of a federal whistleblower lawsuit.

Michael Barnhill is a former welding inspector on the project who lives in Texas. He claims in U.S. District Court in the Southern District of West Virginia that he was fired in late 2023 after raising safety concerns, including issues around corrosion and faulty welding.

EQT, the natural gas producer that owns the pipeline, has asked Judge David Faber to dismiss the case.

The Manns are not part of the lawsuit. Still, Paula says the years of construction upended their lives.

Some landowners got compensation for the pipeline to cross their property. Though they've had to live with the impacts of having the line so close to their home, the Manns received nothing.

"They paid the people where they went through their property," Paula Mann said. "They paid them, but then the landowners adjacent got nothing, even if they messed up their water or whatever, and they messed up a lot of people's water wells and everything, but they got no compensation from it."

The pipeline's builders took some landowners to court to gain access to their property through eminent domain. The courts allowed the company to take the property it needed to finish the nearly \$10 billion project.

The Manns weren't caught up in those disputes, but they've not had a warm relationship with the pipeline's operator.

"They didn't like us that good anyway, because we opposed it," Paula Mann said.

Shawn Day, a spokesman for the pipeline, says the Manns should receive the test results for their water quality in a few weeks.

Dobbin Slashings Preserve is now open

By The West Virginia Nature Conservancy

The moment many of you have been waiting for—Dobbin Slashings Preserve is now open for public visitation!

We’re excited to share that the Dobbin Slashings Preserve, a stunning landscape in the heart of the Canaan Valley and Dolly Sods region, is now open for daylight-hour visitation! Whether you’re a hiker, nature enthusiast, or simply curious to explore, this unique preserve offers a chance to connect with nature in a truly special place—and we’re actively working with local agencies to improve trail conditions and access to make your experience even better.

So, what is permitted at Dobbin Slashings Preserve?



(Photo by the West Virginia Nature Conservancy)

Trail access to the Dobbin Slashings Preserve is available from two points: the Rocky Ridge Trail from the Dolly Sods Wilderness

Area, and the Cabin Mountain and Cabin Mountain Spur Trails from the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

Biking is only permitted on a short section of trail that connects the two paths on the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge trails.

Horseback riding is NOT currently permitted.

Hunting is allowed for deer only, with a valid license and membership in the Mountain Top Hunt Club. The preserve will be closed during the two-week deer rifle season to allow exclusive access for the club. During other hunting seasons, mixed use is permitted—please be courteous, wear blaze orange and stay alert!

Fishing is not currently promoted, but it is not prohibited. The

WVDNR is working to restore Red Creek with limestone fines to support native brook trout populations, so stay tuned for future updates on the fishery.

Trail Conditions and Etiquette: Trails follow old jeep roads and railroad grades—expect mud, deep water and rough terrain.

Please stay on the trail and avoid widening paths when navigating obstacles.

No camping or overnight parking is permitted at this time.

Check out the trail map for trail connections and access points!

We’re thrilled to welcome you to Dobbin Slashings and appreciate your help in protecting this incredible landscape. Let’s explore responsibly and celebrate this new chapter together!

BECOME A WVHC 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

The Economic Impact of West Virginia State Parks

By Scott Durham

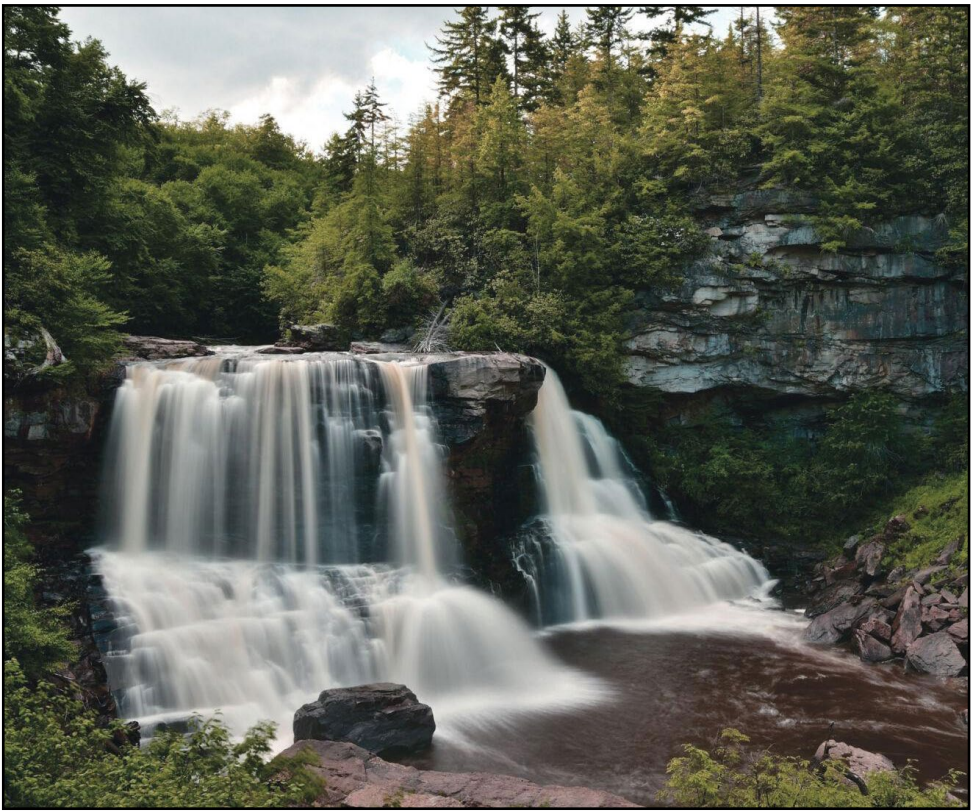
All information was pulled from the study, “The Economic and Fiscal Impacts of West Virginia State Parks and Forests: Fiscal Year 2023”

In Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23), for every \$1 of general tax revenue provided to the park system, \$18.54, on average, was generated in fresh money that likely would not be there if not for the operation of West Virginia State Parks and Forests.

For every \$1 of tax money spent on WV State Parks, State Parks generate \$1.23 in tax revenue. Said another way, WV State Parks are 123% self-sufficient.

In FY23, visitors to West Virginia State Parks and Forests spent an estimated \$482.97M in the state. Approximately 57.68 percent [\$278.57M] of this spending was by out-of-state visitors. The total economic activity stimulated by West Virginia State Parks and Forests during FY23 was approximately \$521.56M.

The total economic impact



Blackwater Falls State Park in Davis, West Virginia. (Photo by the WV Department of Tourism)

from travelers to/from West Virginia State Parks and Forests during FY23 was an estimated \$421.95M. Economic impact from travelers, a component of total economic activity, is a measure of “fresh money” infused

into the state’s economy that likely would not have been generated in the absence of the park system.

Regarding employment, the economic activity stimulated by visitation to West Virginia State Parks

and Forests supported approximately 5,256 jobs in the state during FY23.

In terms of wages and income, the economic activity spawned by West Virginia State Parks and Forests was responsible for roughly \$187.85MM in wages and salary income in FY23.

Economic activity stimulated by West Virginia State Parks and Forests generated approximately \$27.92M in state and local tax revenues during FY23. As such, roughly \$1.23 in state and local tax revenues were generated for every \$1 of tax money spent on the park system.

Economic activity created by West Virginia State Parks and Forests was associated with approximately \$288.66M in value-added effects which is a measure of the park system’s contribution to the gross domestic product of the state. These effects are especially important at the park-by-park level where most of the impact is retained in the local area.

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 for years to come.

Your thoughtful planning now will allow us to continue our work to protect wilderness, wildlife, clean air and water and our way of life in the mountains. Contact crys.bauer@wvhighlands.org

Are you on our email list?

Signing up to receive emails from the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is your gateway to staying actively engaged in conservation efforts and volunteer opportunities in West Virginia.



Staying informed with our action alerts will empower you to advocate for environmental policies that matter the most. **Sign up today at bit.ly/WVHCemailsingup**

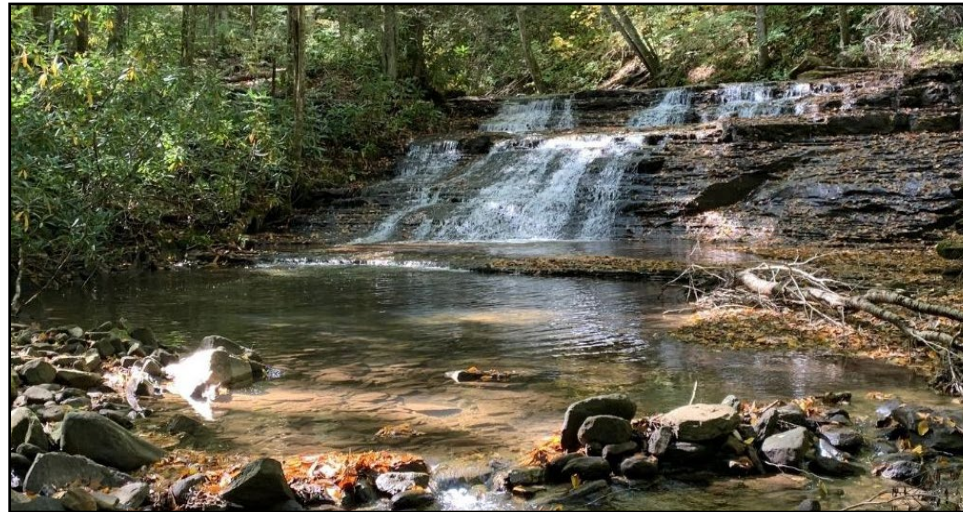
Federal court clears path for legal challenges to coal-hauling in Monongahela National Forest

A federal judge in Delaware ruled Tuesday in favor of two motions filed by conservation groups, allowing key legal and administrative actions to move forward to protect portions of the Monongahela National Forest from mining activities by South Fork Coal Company, despite the company's bankruptcy proceedings. South Fork Coal Company filed for bankruptcy in February 2025.

Today's ruling lifts the bankruptcy-related pause — known as an “automatic stay” — on two separate efforts by conservation advocates to stop illegal coal hauling operations by the company through the Monongahela National Forest. The decision breathes new life into legal actions and administrative appeals aimed at holding the federal government accountable for allowing these destructive activities in one of West Virginia's most cherished public landscapes.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Appalachian Voices, Greenbrier River Watershed Association, Kanawha Forest Coalition, Center for Biological Diversity and the West Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club are all plaintiffs in the ongoing lawsuit. Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance joins West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Appalachian Voices in the administrative matters.

“Yesterday's orders reaffirm a



Becky Run in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. (Photo by Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance)

simple principle: Bankruptcy is not a free pass to ignore environmental laws or silence public oversight,” said Andrew Young, staff attorney for the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance. “This is a win for the Monongahela National Forest, for clean water and for every American who refuses to let our public lands be sacrificed for short-term profit.”

The conservation groups are represented by Appalachian Mountain Advocates and the Center for Biological Diversity in the U.S. Forest Service matter, and by the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance in the administrative matters. Ashby & Geddes provided local counsel in the South Fork Coal Company bankruptcy proceedings. In 2024, the groups sued the U.S. Forest Service for allowing coal trucks and heavy

equipment to be transported through the Monongahela National Forest in violation of the Endangered Species Act and other key environmental laws. Some of the groups also began formal appeals under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to revoke permits granted without proper environmental oversight.

The court's decision allows both the lawsuit against the Forest Service and the ongoing administrative appeals within the Department of the Interior to proceed while the company remains in bankruptcy.

South Fork Coal Company has been cited for more than 140 environmental violations since 2019. These violations occurred overwhelmingly in the Cherry River watershed, a habitat for the endangered candy darter and a vital headwater

of the Gauley River, a cornerstone of the region's ecotourism economy. The company's permit, issued in 2013, was based on unsupported claims that its operations did not impact the national forest, yet records show that hauling through the forest began as early as 2021 and has continued largely unchecked until early 2025.

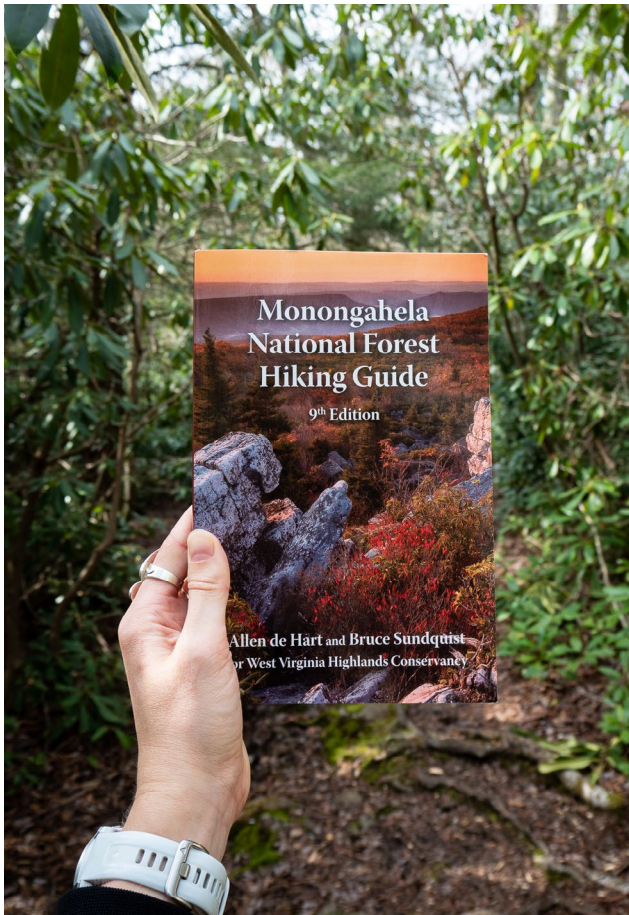
In January, after conservation groups submitted evidence of the illegal coal hauling, federal regulators temporarily ceased coal hauling on the roads in the national forest. But that decision was quietly reversed just weeks later, in a proceeding that the public and conservation groups were not notified about.

“We have members who fish and paddle the Cherry River and hike in the Monongahela National Forest,” said Willie Dodson, Coal Impacts Program Manager at Appalachian Voices. “They care deeply about this place. We are drawing a line in the sand — if coal companies think they will get a rubber stamp to steamroll public lands and clean water, they're in for a fight.”

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and Appalachian Voices also filed a separate lawsuit against South Fork Coal in December 2024 for repeated violations of the Clean Water Act. That case remains on hold due to the company's bankruptcy.

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.

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.

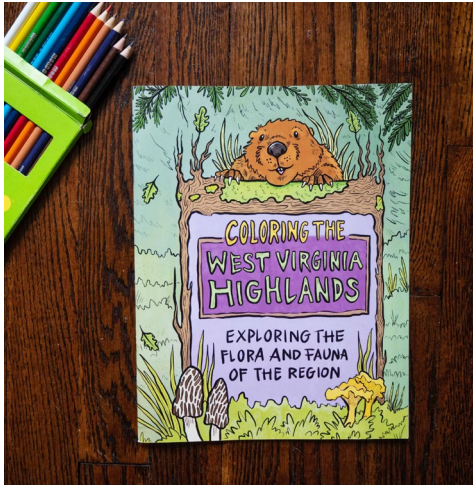
The Monongahela National Forest has long been known as a ‘Special Place.’ The hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing opportunities it provides are among the best in the eastern U.S. New wilderness and backcountry trails have been added to the outstanding areas we have appreciated for decades – 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 \$21.95 plus \$5.38 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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Show your love for the mountains with our range of bumper stickers, cotton tees, hats, onesies, toddler tees and Hydro Flasks. Shop now at wvhighlands.org



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