

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The Highlands Voice

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Highlands Conservancy members gather for 2025 Fall Review at Blackwater Falls

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy’s 2025 Fall Review brought together advocates, students, and community leaders for a weekend of learning, discussion, and exploration in the heart of the highlands. From hikes across Dolly Sods and Blackwater Falls to thought-provoking panels on climate, policy, and organizing, this year’s Fall Review highlighted both the beauty of West Virginia’s landscapes and the ongoing work needed to protect them.

The weekend kicked off with a Friday afternoon hike in Dolly Sods led by the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards, followed by a festive Hal-



Rafe Pomerance speaks to attendees at the Fall Review. (Photo by Monongahela Media/Mark Moody)

loween networking event complete with live music and local camaraderie. But the heart of the Fall Review unfolded on Saturday, where panels and speakers tackled some of the most pressing issues facing Appala-

chia’s environment.

The morning began with “Federal Policy and Appalachia”, featuring Lyndsay Tarus of the Alliance for Appalachia and Quenton King of Appalachian Voices, who explored

how decisions in Washington ripple through West Virginia’s communities and ecosystems. The discussion underscored the importance of grassroots advocacy in shaping national policy outcomes that affect local livelihoods and landscapes.

Next, the “West Virginia’s Legislative Landscape” panel brought together Mike Jones of West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Lucia Valentine of the West Virginia Women’s Alliance, and Delegate Evan Hansen. The conversation examined the year’s biggest environmental battles expected at the State Capitol—from clean water protections to the fight for renewable energy investment—arming attendees with insight and

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strategies for engaging in the upcoming legislative session.

In the late morning, Rafe Pomerance, a longtime climate policy advocate and Woodwell Climate Research Center fellow, gave a stirring presentation on “The Launch of the Climate Movement and Where We Go From Here.” His talk traced the roots of global climate activism and challenged attendees to keep pushing for bold, science-based solutions in the face of mounting ecological threats.

After lunch, the day turned toward the future with Mary Anne Hitt of Climate Imperative, who spoke on “The Future of Climate Action and the Clean Energy Transition.” Her optimism for the potential of clean energy in Appalachia inspired many, showing how the region’s communities can lead in sustainable innovation rather than be left behind.

Saturday concluded with a panel titled “Looking Back, Moving Forward,” featuring Pam Moe of Corridor H Alternatives, investigative journalist and MacArthur Fellow Ken Ward Jr., and Jim Kotcon of the Sierra Club. Each offered personal reflections on decades of environmental advocacy in the Mountain State, emphasizing persistence, collaboration, and hope as the keys to lasting change. Then, Tyler Cannon,



WVHC team members Christa Clasgens, Jordan Howes, and Olivia Miller at the Fall Review. (Photo by Monongahela Media/Mark Moody)

with West Virginia Citizen Action Group, led an energizing session on “Fundamentals of Organizing,” providing practical tools for turning inspiration into action.

Throughout the weekend, attendees also enjoyed guided hikes with park naturalists, a lively Saturday evening presentation by Cameron Layne on the colorful biodiversity of West Virginia’s stream fishes, and Sunday’s Pase Point hike that capped the event with reflection and renewal.

The Fall Review also welcomed several scholarship recipients—made possible through generous support from the American Water Charitable Foundation—whose participation added new energy to the event.

West Virginia University student Jackson Licklider shared, **“Never had I met such an inviting and caring group of people. The speakers were extremely informative, speaking on the truth of the issues at stake in West Virginia and, at a broader scope, the world. Leaving this weekend, I felt a first-time certainty for my future and a hope to build a career in integrat-**

ed nonprofit scientific work within the state.”

Another scholarship recipient, Aleta Rader of Glenville State University, said, **“Being in a room full of people making history, influencing legislation that impacts West Virginia and Appalachia, and making public statements about those issues is important. Environmental history is a large part of Appalachian history, and being among those leading that movement was special to me.”**

Rader also credited the Fall Review for helping her forge new academic and community connections, including an upcoming student event on native fish conservation inspired by presenter Cameron Layne. “I left with heaps of information, some of which I have already shared with fellow students and even professors new to the area,” she said.

As the WVHC continues its decades-long mission to protect and preserve the state’s wild places, the Fall Review stands as a testament to what can happen when passionate people come together—to share ideas, rekindle hope, and plan for a resilient, thriving Appalachia.

Air Quality Board holds first hearing on power plant appeal

By Luanne McGovern, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Tucker United and the Sierra Club filed an appeal for the air permit issued to Fundamental Data for a large natural gas power plant in Tucker County on Sept. 12, 2025. The appeal challenges the company’s claims that the plant qualifies as a “synthetic minor source” of pollution, and states that critical information has been hidden from public view through extensive redactions.

The first hearing of our appeal before the West Virginia Air Quality Board was held on Nov. 5 at the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) office in Charleston. Before the hearing, more than 30 concerned citizens came out to rally and protest the permit, calling for justice for Tucker County.

The Air Quality Board is an independent board whose mission is to “adjudicate air quality appeals in a fair, efficient and equitable manner.” Board members are appointed by the governor and represent the public at large, industry and the government. We, the appellants, were ably represented by Mike Becher from Appalachian Mountain Advocates; the DEP, the appellee, was represented by Scott Driver; and Fundamental Data, the intervenor, was represented

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West Virginians asked to foot the bill for Virginia's data center boom

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

West Virginians are being asked once again to sacrifice their farmland, their mountains, and their pocketbooks—all to keep the lights on for Virginia's ever-expanding data center corridor.

The proposed Mid-Atlantic Resiliency Link (MARL), a 155-mile high-voltage transmission line planned by NextEra Energy, would stretch from Greene County, Pennsylvania, through Monongalia, Preston, Hampshire, and Mineral counties in West Virginia before terminating in Loudoun County, Virginia—also known as Data Center Alley. The line is designed to deliver roughly 750 megawatts of power to fuel Virginia's rapidly growing digital infrastructure.

That electricity will come directly from West Virginia's coal-fired power plants—including Fort Martin, Harrison, Mitchell and Longview—meaning our state's fossil-fuel generation will be used to power Virginia's data centers, not West Virginia's own communities.

But as several speakers made clear at an Oct. 15 community meeting hosted by West Virginians Against Transmission Injustice (WATI) at the Cheat Lake Fire Hall,



Attendees and signs at the recent community meeting regarding the MARL transmission line. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

the power isn't the only thing being exported—so are the costs, the impacts, and the risks.

Delegate Dave McCormick, who represents the Cheat Lake area, didn't mince words: "This power line increases our costs, doesn't do anything to benefit us. Essentially, we're being an extension cord to Virginia." He said he's already delivered letters of opposition to Governor Patrick Morrisey and the West Virginia Public Service Commission (PSC), which will ultimately decide whether the project moves forward.

The PSC—three appointed individuals in Charleston—could greenlight the project as soon as this fall. Local officials across the region, including members of the Monongalia County Commission, have expressed their opposition. "We see no tangible benefit to the state of West Virginia," one commissioner said. "Name your county—there's nothing here that does anything benefit to us."

For landowners like Kent Hunter, whose property sits near University High School, and Beth Ann

Bossio, who operates a seed and Christmas tree farm near the proposed route, the project threatens not just scenery but livelihoods. "It is a land grab," Bossio told the packed room. "Every day it's weighing on all of our minds."

Despite promises of "local benefits," WATI members and speakers pointed out that the math doesn't add up. Counties may receive property tax revenues, but those funds are assessed by the state and depreciate each year—meaning the payout dwindles quickly. And since utilities are allowed to recover their costs through customer rates, West Virginians will ultimately pay for the very project being built across their land.

"They'll provide that money by raising our rates and giving some back to the county," one attendee said. "They don't actually pay taxes—it's coming out of our pockets."

Meanwhile, the real beneficiaries—Virginia's data centers and the multinational corporations behind them—will continue to demand more power. PJM Interconnection, the regional grid operator, has already identified an additional 750-megawatt shortfall due to data center growth and is considering a second MARL line, possibly con-

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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- 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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necting to a new natural gas-fired plant in West Virginia.

In other words, the energy flowing from our coal plants will keep servers humming in Northern Virginia, while West Virginians are left to bear the environmental, economic, and social costs of extraction.

Virginia reaps the digital profits; West Virginia shoulders the extraction, infrastructure, and environmental sacrifice.

Adding to these concerns is another proposal known as the Valley Link Project—a sprawling 260-mile network of new 765-kilovolt transmission lines proposed by Transource Energy that would cut across Barbour, Braxton, Calhoun, Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Kanawha, Lewis, Preston, Putnam, Roane, Tucker, and Upshur counties. Like MARL, the Valley Link lines are part of PJM's regional transmission expansion plan, designed to move massive amounts of electricity eastward to serve Virginia's energy-hungry data centers. Together, the MARL and Valley Link projects represent an unprecedented build-out of industrial-scale transmission across the Mountain State—exporting West Virginia's coal and natural gas power to keep Virginia's data center industry online.

West Virginians Against Transmission Injustice (WATI) formed earlier this year as a grassroots re-

sponse to the MARL proposal, bringing together residents, farmers, and local officials across north-central West Virginia. The group aims to educate communities, help landowners intervene in PSC proceedings, and hold both NextEra and state officials accountable.

“Even if you don't have the transmission line in your backyard or in your view,” said Hunter, “it's going to impact each and every one of us in West Virginia.”

WATI urges residents to stay engaged, contact their legislators, and prepare to intervene when NextEra files its permit with the PSC—likely this fall. Landowners who intervene gain legal standing to testify, file briefs, and appeal PSC decisions. Those who don't risk being left out entirely.

For longtime energy-justice advocates like Keryn Newman, who helped stop the PATH transmission project more than a decade ago, the fight feels familiar. “We've seen this before,” she said. “They promise economic benefit and reliability, but what we end up with is higher rates, lost farms, and irreversible scars on the landscape.”

As data centers multiply across the Mid-Atlantic, their energy footprint is sprawling outward—crossing borders and burdening communities that will never see the supposed rewards.

West Virginians, once again, are being asked to pay the price for someone else's power.

For more information or to get involved, visit wvatli.org.

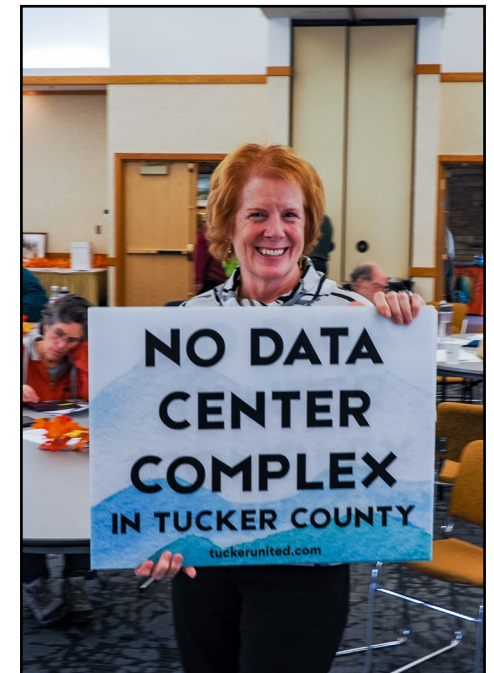
Air Quality Board holds first hearing on power plant appeal

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by Dave Yaussey and James Walls from Spilman, Thomas and Battle. The Board agreed to only hear two motions during this hearing, leaving the larger appeal to the hearing on Dec. 3.

The first motion was for additional data from the permit application to be released to the appellants to better prepare for our permit appeal. The Board members spent over an hour asking pointed and relevant questions about the need for the extensive redactions. After deliberation, the Board instructed the three parties' lawyers to meet and develop an “agreeable protective order” that would allow our lawyer and expert witness to see the redacted information and to use that information in our appeal. The Board set a deadline of Nov. 12 for the agreement; otherwise, the Board would develop its own agreement. This is a significant positive outcome for the appellants.

The second motion, filed by the DEP, sought to dismiss three of the 17 objections in the appeal. The DEP was granted the dismissals for Objection No. 8 (fugitive emissions from mobile sources) and No. 12 (consideration that the plant would be used for a data center), but denied the dismissal for Objection No. 16—that “Appellee failed to adhere to the purpose of the West Virginia Air Pollution Control Act, as described



Luanne McGovern pictured at the WVHC's Fall Review. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

in W. Va. Code § 22-5-1,3 when it permitted Fundamental Data's Ridgeline Facility as a synthetic minor source of pollution.” 15 of our objections will be argued in the Dec. 3 hearing. All of the documents for the appeal and hearing can be found on the Air Quality Board's website.

The WVHC extends its thanks for the outpouring of support from around the state in our fight against Fundamental Data and this power plant. Please come out on Dec. 3 for the next hearing or join by Zoom—time and location are still to be determined, but we will post updates on social media and through email.

If you are able, please consider contributing to our legal fund.

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



Protecting West Virginia's wild waters: the push to safeguard 16 iconic rivers

By Mike Jones, West Virginia Rivers Coalition

West Virginia has one Wild and Scenic River. About 10 miles of the Bluestone River is permanently designated under the National Wild and Scenic River Act. Designation keeps the Bluestone free-flowing (that means no dams!) and protects its remarkable values.

West Virginia should not stop at only 10 miles of protected Wild and Scenic waterways.

Did you know that 16 waterways in the Monongahela National Forest are eligible for permanent designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers?

That's right — more than 490 river miles in West Virginia can be protected, NOW. These are among West Virginia's iconic waterways and include all or portions of the Blackwater, Shavers Fork, Dry Fork, East Fork of the Greenbrier, West Fork of the Greenbrier, the Greenbrier, the Cranberry, Gladly Fork, Laurel Fork, Otter Creek, Red Creek, Seneca Creek, North Fork of the Cherry, Williams, South Branch of the Potomac, and North Fork of South Branch of the Potomac.

The U.S. Forest Service found these waterways eligible for Wild and Scenic designation in the 1980s and 1990s. They've been managing the waterways since then. But agencies can change their minds or not take the care that these waterways deserve. Permanent designation by Congress would ensure these waterways remain protected.

Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968 in re-



Scenic shot of Otter Creek Wilderness Area. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

sponse to concerns about damming rivers and industrialization along rivers. The Act prohibits any dams on a designated river — to keep it free flowing. The Act also provides for each waterway to be recognized for having one or more “outstandingly remarkable values” — such as scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values.

The act does not further define “outstandingly remarkable values.” However, it is clear that a designation does not limit public access to waters, does not allow the public onto private lands, does not restrict what a private landowner can do with their property, and does not affect hunting or fishing laws, which continue to be determined by the state of West Virginia.

Under the Wild and Scenic Riv-

ers Act, waterways are designated as “wild” (which means limited access and then only by trail), “scenic” (some accessibility by roads), or “recreational” (readily accessible by road or train, with some development along its shoreline).

It's great to bring positive news — a positive way to help ensure that the things we treasure — drinking water, unique species and our waterways — can be safeguarded for our children and grandchildren. This is not a “stop something” or “rebuild something” idea.

These 16 West Virginia waterways are free-flowing. These waterways are remarkably beautiful, have remarkable recreation values, protect remarkable West Virginia aquatic species, and have remarkable histories. This is an idea that protects our legacy, protects species, and can

bring economic benefits to people, businesses, and communities in the Monongahela National Forest.

For starters, over 9% of the folks in the United States trace the ultimate source of their drinking water to Monongahela National Forest headwaters.

Wild and Scenic River designations in West Virginia also would protect wildlife and habitat. Connectivity of cold-water habitat would be preserved for sensitive, threatened and endangered aquatic species such as the Eastern brook trout, freshwater mussels, hellbenders, checkered sculpins and the candy darter. The West Virginia northern flying squirrel, Virginia big-eared bat, Indiana bat, Cheat Mountain salamander and other flora and fauna also depend on protected riparian habitat.

Wild and Scenic designation also means economic and recreational opportunities. West Virginia faces multiple economic challenges, including the need to find new opportunities for individuals and communities. Two direct economic benefits should result from enacting Wild and Scenic River designations for these 16 waterways.

First, there is the economic benefit of visitors who engage in outdoor recreation. Researchers Bowker and Bergstrom (2017) summarized 22 studies and found that the average recreational-use economic value of visits to Wild and Scenic Rivers is \$99 per person, per day, or \$1.62 per river mile per day. Visits to Wild and Scenic Rivers also generate indirect

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community economic benefits, such as increased employment in restaurants and other local businesses. Economic benefits also can be measured in terms of species diversity, ecosystem services and the restoration of fish or wildlife populations enhanced by protected rivers.

Secondly, private property values may increase because of proximity to a Wild and Scenic River. In one published study, property values rose for properties closer to a designated river, with as much as 42% of a property's value derived from its proximity to a Wild and Scenic River.

For more than five years, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, and others have been working quietly to help folks learn about the importance of these 16 waterways, how the Wild and Scenic River Act can be used to protect species and benefit West Virginians, and to build support for Congressional action to safeguard them permanently.

We've held listening sessions and community meetings. Overwhelmingly, people said, 'Protect

the headwaters.' Polling found 85% of West Virginia voters support permanent Wild and Scenic River designation for these headwaters. We've built a website with more information at www.wvwaterways.org, engaged with community groups and built relationships with the staffs of U.S. Sens. Shelley Moore Capito and Joe Manchin and Reps. Carol Miller and Alex Mooney.

In March 2026, we will go to Washington, D.C., to ask our elected officials to file, support and vote for the West Virginia Headwaters Legacy Act, which would add 492 river miles in West Virginia to the national list of Wild and Scenic Rivers.

We want to take you with us. There are two ways to join. First, we're looking for one or two local Mon Forest residents — business owners, landowners, anglers or elected officials — to come to Washington with us. If you're interested, email Mike Jones at mjones@wvivers.org.

The other way to "go to Washington" is to sign the petition that we will present to West Virginia's congressional delegation.

We'd like to take 1,000 of you with us to show Washington that we love our 16 waterways — and we want them protected. Please sign the petition using the QR code provided in this article. Be part of the 1,000!

Sign the petition that will be presented to WV's congressional delegation using the QR code below.



Board highlights from the Fall Review

By John McFerrin, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

At the fall Board meeting, we took care of some necessary business and then enjoyed hearing about what the organization has been doing.

By our bylaws and state law, we are required to be audited periodically. The information has been sent to a certified public accountant for review, so that process is now underway.

We have long discussed our investment policy. We don't want our savings to support activities inconsistent with our values. To that end, we adopted an investment policy that, most notably, prohibits investing in fossil fuels.

The treasurer reported that, overall, we are in good financial shape. Grant funding has increased revenue, and because some types of securities are paying more than anticipated when the budget was made, investment income is also higher than expected. Expenses remain relatively flat.

Dolly Sods Stewards' leader Dave Johnston reported on another successful year. The Stewards had 48 participants, up from 43 last year, and logged 930 volunteer hours with the crosscut sawyer team, 230 with solitude monitoring, 209 with trail maintenance, and 1,070 with the backcountry stewards—totaling

2,780 volunteer hours. Including administrative work, the total comes to just over 3,500 hours, an increase of about 30% from last year.

The solitude monitoring program has now completed one survey in each season, following Forest Service protocols. The backcountry stewards have cleaned up abandoned campsites and extinguished unattended campfires. The Forest Service has expressed its appreciation for their efforts.

A potential issue was raised concerning the liming of the headwaters of Red Creek, a peat bog known as Dobbin Slashings. For several years, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources has added lime in the headwaters. Now that The Nature Conservancy owns Dobbin Slashings, questions have arisen about whether the practice is appropriate. Red Creek is naturally acidic—so should we be liming a system where acidity may be largely natural? There was no decision to be made and no urgency for action, so the Board took no position at this time.

Mike Jones reported on public lands. With the Legislature's session approaching, preparation is underway. There were 700,000 comments opposing changes to the Roadless Rule in national forests, and a decision is pending. The new forest plan for The Monongahela National Forest will likely not be completed until 2030. To achieve the best outcome, we need to begin identifying our priorities and preparing to advocate for them.

Andrew Young provided an update on litigation involving the South Fork Coal Company mines.

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Don't take our dark skies for granted

By Go North Alliance

We are blessed with many natural gifts in Tucker County – our beautiful mountains and valleys, the plentiful rivers and streams that flow through them, abundant wetlands, forests, and meadows teeming with animal and plant life. All this, and more, is easily accessible to residents and visitors on land or by water, and we can experience it in relative solitude. Protecting these natural environments from ever-present air and water pollution and development threats is a priority for many individuals and organizations in Tucker County, including the Go North Alliance.

Our abundance of natural gifts extends beyond those within Earth's atmosphere. Tucker County also boasts some of the clearest, darkest skies in the eastern United States, offering us an incredible view of stars too numerous to count, frequent meteor sightings, and the occasional comet (like now!). It is perhaps this nighttime show of natural wonder that we take most for granted. The stars feel eternal and out of our realm of protection, don't they?

In one sense, that's true. It is difficult for any of us to imagine the stars themselves ever disappearing. But the dark skies that enable us to view the magnificence of the heavens have vanished from urban areas around the world due to another insidious form of pollution – light pollution from artificial lights. Here in Tucker County, we can still see the Milky Way stretch across the night sky on clear nights, and even glimpse its haze on cloudy ones. Yet



according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), one-third of the world's population, and 80% of the population of the US, cannot see the Milky Way from their homes because of artificial light pollution.

Not only is it incredibly relaxing, pleasurable and awe-inspiring to spend time on a dark night gazing at the wonders of the sky, but the natural cycles of light and dark are important to human health. They're equally crucial for wildlife. Nearly 70% of the world's animals are nocturnal and depend on darkness for hunting and foraging, reproduction, navigation and protection from predators. There are even some species of plants that only bloom at night, supporting species of noctur-

nal pollinators like bats and insects.

Protecting our dark skies has become a key focus for Blackwater Falls State Park management and its non-profit support organization, the Blackwater Falls State Park Foundation. Together, they are working toward certification as an International Dark Sky Park and have already inventoried all of the park's lighting and are actively replacing non-compliant fixtures. Designated dark sky places provide a refuge for humans to enjoy, and an environment to enhance their mental and physical health and sense of wonder. And for local fauna and flora, they are oases where they can live their lives in accordance with the natural rhythms of light and dark with which they evolved.

Unfortunately, there are two large-scale, light-polluting projects that have been proposed near Davis and Thomas. One is the ROPA, the West Virginia Division of Highways' preferred route for Corridor H from Parsons to Davis. It includes an enormous bridge over the North Fork of the Blackwater River near Douglas. Although DOH has been vague and sometimes self-contradictory about bridge lighting, it will likely include fixtures that would negatively affect our dark skies.

The other is a power plant and data center complex just outside of Davis and Thomas. Facilities like these are known large-scale contributors to light pollution, producing a glow that can be observed for many miles. Both projects may jeopardize the work at Blackwater Falls State Park toward dark skies certification, as well as the ability of Tucker County residents and visitors, and our local plants and animals, to enjoy and thrive under our dark skies.

Many individuals and businesses in Tucker County already recognize the importance of dark skies and have taken simple steps to reduce their contribution to light pollution. Please do your part to help, wherever you call home. Individual mitigation of light pollution is easy: install shielded outdoor fixtures where all light is directed down, and lightbulbs are of fewer lumens and warmer colors (amber vs. white).

Our dark skies are worth saving, for ourselves, for future generations, and for the plants and animals that share this incredible area we all love.

Board highlights from the Fall Review

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The company, already in financial distress, has shifted from a Chapter 11 bankruptcy (reorganization) to a Chapter 7 bankruptcy (liquidation). This means mining operations have ceased. While the bankruptcy trustee could sell the permits to another operator, complications make that unlikely. The mines have left a substantial mess that will require cleanup, raising questions about who will do it and where the funding will come from.

Membership and Outreach Director Christa Clasgens reported that

the Conservancy store and membership programs continue to thrive. She has been working on a short film about Helen McGinnis and her years of advocacy for the Monongahela National Forest and Dolly Sods. She shared a nearly complete version of the film, which will be finished and ready for distribution soon. Christa is also helping plan a landowner rights workshop and a fly-tying workshop.

Program Director Olivia Miller reported on her wide range of activities. She has been coordinating the Fall Review, supporting the Wilderness Stewards, advancing advocacy on Corridor H, working on the data center issue, and preparing several grant applications. She also organized two outings this year—a float trip on the Cheat River and a snorkeling trip on Shavers Fork.

Julia Huffman, daughter of former Board member Beth Little, has

completed a film about her mother’s life—focusing on her early career as a computer programmer in Los Angeles and her later years in Pocahontas County. The film will be screened Nov. 30 at the Pocahontas County Opera House in Marlinton. For more about Beth, including a photo of the filmmaker, see the February 2019 issue of The Highlands Voice.

Luanne McGovern reported on opposition to the proposed data center. The opposition coalition continues to raise funds, and hearings for related appeals are scheduled for November and December. The appeals address whether the facility should be classified as a minor or major pollution source; whether redactions in the permit application prevented meaningful public comment; whether the permit should have required emissions monitoring; and whether the facility com-

plies with the West Virginia Air Pollution Control Act.

Hugh Rogers reported that developments on Corridor H are expected soon. The Federal Highway Administration previously directed the West Virginia Department of Highways to consider the Go North alternative favored by the Conservancy. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be released around Nov. 21, 2025. That document will reveal whether the Department gave the northern alternative serious consideration or merely a cursory review while justifying its long-preferred route.

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Working to Keep West Virginia Wild and Wonderful
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Reeling in responsibility: why fall is the time to fish smart in West Virginia

By Christa Clasgens, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

As the temperatures drop and the sun sets earlier, this is the time of year when many retreat indoors. For others—especially anglers—it’s a season they eagerly await. For many, autumn brings some of the best conditions for trout fishing. Increased precipitation raises water levels above summer pools, cooler temperatures create an ideal environment for trout, and the muted sounds of nature blend only with the rush of water past your feet.

In many West Virginia waterways, trout are stocked by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR) during the fall. A special “monster trout” stocking program recently wrapped up. While visiting your favorite fishing hole, you might find these unusually large fish—and some come with a bonus: tags.

The WVDNR attaches bright pink tags to select trophy-sized trout that give anglers the chance to win a stay at a West Virginia State Park



Photo from a fishing excursion with Chrsita Clasgens. (Photo by Monongahela Media/Mark Moody)

cabin or a Cabela’s gift package. Only 100 trout have been tagged among the many stocked this season.

There are other opportunities these fish provide—especially for ensuring the longevity of our fisheries. Many of the trout stocked in the state are rainbow trout, well-known for attracting anglers from both in and out of state. However, many don’t realize rainbow trout differ from brown and brook trout.

Beyond their distinct color patterns, rainbow trout spawn in the spring, while brown and brook trout spawn in the fall. Harvesting rain-

bow trout in autumn may prevent them from ever spawning in spring, meaning larger rainbows lose the opportunity to pass on their “monster” genetics. Their significant size difference also means they carry substantially more eggs than the average rainbow.

How can we enjoy trout fishing while also ensuring the success of our fisheries for years to come? By practicing catch-and-release. This greatly increases the chances that the trout you catch will live, spawn, and provide opportunities for others to enjoy the fishery.

Safe catch-and-release prac-

tices include avoiding holding trout by the mouth (as is done with large-mouth bass), keeping them wet, using a net when landing them, and handling them only with bare, wet hands. If you want to snap a picture of your fish of a lifetime, keep it in the net and in the water until ready, take a few quick shots, and gently release it back into the water.

There are many waters in West Virginia already designated as catch-and-release sections. Following these regulations—and identifying areas marked as delayed harvest, fly-fishing only, or catch-and-release only—not only prevents citations from the WVDNR but also helps ensure those stretches maintain a robust trout population.

In the angling world, particularly among fly fishers, many live by the credo: “Let them go, let them grow.” If you find yourself in the mountains fishing your favorite stream this fall, consider these tips to ensure that you—and future generations—see more trout in the seasons ahead.

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**

Upcoming film screening explores Appalachian roots and mother-daughter bonds

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Award-winning filmmaker Julia Huffman will return to her family's Appalachian roots this month for a special screening of her newest documentary, *Mother Daughter Earth*, on Sunday, Nov. 30 at 1 p.m. at the Pocahontas County Opera House. The film, a deeply personal exploration of memory, nature, and legacy, reflects Huffman's relationship with her mother, Beth Little, a former West Virginia Highlands Conservancy board member — and the enduring influence of Appalachia on their lives.

Over the past 25 years, Huffman's visits home inspired the film's evolution. "My mother turned 84 this year and the days began to feel fleeting, so I decided to tell the story of her remarkable life," Huffman said. "She was one of the early female computer programmers in Los Angeles, who left it all to live much like a pioneer woman in the country. While working on the story, I realized that when we tell our mothers' stories, we inevitably learn more about ourselves."

Huffman's new work serves as both a tribute to her mother and a meditation on the ties that connect people to one another and to the land. "This film is for mothers, daughters, adoptees, people with aging parents,



Beth Little and Julia Huffman

nature lovers, and everyone in between," she said. "It is ultimately a love letter to mothers and daughters and to the Appalachian Mountains."

Huffman is best known for her critically acclaimed documentary *Medicine of the Wolf*, which won the Grand Jury Award at the Arizona International Film Festival and Best of Fest at the Minneapolis International Film Festival. Her work has

been endorsed by renowned conservationist Dr. Jane Goodall and artists including James Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, and Graham Nash. In addition to her film work, Huffman has collaborated with organizations such as the Sierra Club and spoken at TEDx Fargo on the importance of apex predators.

Through *Mother Daughter Earth*, Huffman continues her life-

long dedication to environmental storytelling. "My hope is that stories about the positive influence that many folks like my mother brought to Appalachia in the 1970s are not forgotten," Huffman said. "Her legacy of earth stewardship and her deep affection for both the people and the Appalachian Mountains deserve to be remembered."

She cites author and botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer as an inspiration for the film's core message:

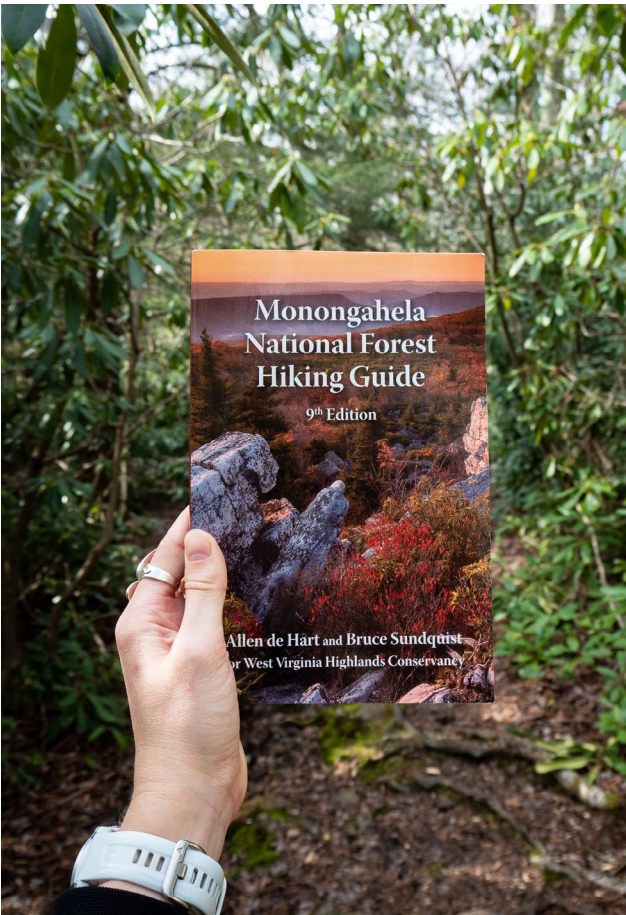
"Knowing that you love the earth changes you and activates you to protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that transforms that relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond."

Huffman's interview with WVMR is scheduled for the week of November 17, and a feature will also appear in *The Pocahontas Times*.

For updates and information on how to attend the screening, follow the Pocahontas County Opera House and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy on social media.

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.

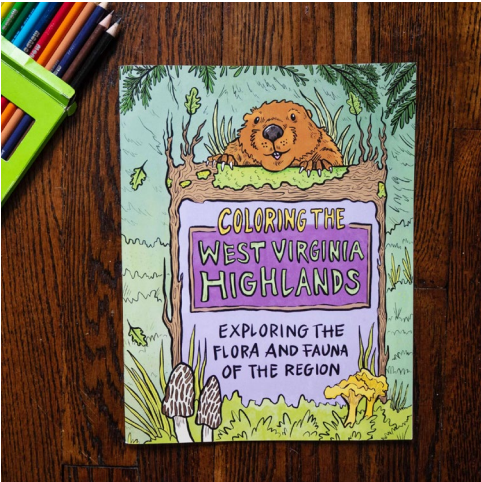
The Monongahela National Forest has long been known as a ‘Special Place.’ The hiking, backpacking, and cross-country skiing opportunities it provides are among the best in the eastern U.S. New wilderness and backcountry trails have been added to the outstanding areas we have appreciated for decades – 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.

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