

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The fight against Fundamental Data continues

By Luanne McGovern, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The past few months have been very busy in our fight against the massive Ridgeline power plant/data center project proposed by Fundamental Data in Tucker County. In conjunction with our partner organizations – Tucker United, the Sierra Club, Friends of Blackwater, West Virginia Rivers and many others – we continue to push back against this travesty in any way possible.

The past few months have been very busy in our fight against the massive Ridgeline power plant/data center project proposed by Fundamental Data in Tucker County. In conjunction with our partner organizations – Tucker United, the Sierra Club, Friends of Blackwater, West Virginia Rivers and many others – we continue to push back against



Representative of Fundamental Data, Lewis Reynolds, spoke to those in attendance at a recent town hall in Davis, WV.

(Photo provided by Friends of Blackwater)

this travesty in any way possible.

One of the most significant developments has been the ongoing legal challenge to the project's air permit, which remains active in the court system.

WVHC, Tucker United and the Sierra Club appealed the Ridgeline

air permit to the West Virginia Air Quality Board in September 2025, asking the board to repeal the permit. After two days of testimony and expert witness presentations, the board rejected our appeal on Feb. 5, 2026, making only one small change to the requirements for additional

stack testing.

We then filed an appeal with the West Virginia Intermediate Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Appeals in October 2025. Fundamental Data subsequently requested that the appeal be heard by the Supreme Court, but that request was rejected on June 3, 2026. Briefs have been filed with the Intermediate Court, but no hearing date has been set.

We appreciate everyone who has contributed to our legal fund, which has allowed us to continue this fight in the courts.

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



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The fight against Fundamental Data continues

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Beyond the courtroom, concerns about political influence and potential conflicts of interest have continued to raise serious questions about the handling of data center legislation and related legal proceedings.

On March 16, 2026 — the day after the West Virginia Legislature ended its session — we were notified that West Virginia Speaker of the House Roger Hanshaw would be representing Fundamental Data in our Intermediate Court appeal. This is the same individual who led the passage of HB 2014 (which stripped local citizens of their rights to challenge data centers) and who ensured that proposed changes to HB 2014 did not advance in the House this year.

It was later revealed that Roger Hanshaw was also representing a data center developer in Mason County. Since these are apparent conflicts of interest, numerous groups have called for Hanshaw to resign from legal cases related to data centers, but he has refused.

We also learned that Judge Dan Greear of the Intermediate Court had Roger Hanshaw as a major supporter of his reelection campaign. Once this became public, Judge Greear requested a ruling on whether he should be recused from hearing the Fundamental Data case. However, it was too late — Judge Greear lost his reelection race to Jim Douglas and will no longer serve on the Interme-



Tucker County residents attend the first town hall held in May 2025 regarding plans for a proposed data center in Tucker County. (Photo by Olivia Miller)

diate Court.

Meanwhile, residents finally had an opportunity to hear directly from Fundamental Data representatives during a series of public events in Tucker County.

On May 16, 2026, Mayor Al Tomson hosted a town hall meeting to update citizens on the Ridgeline project. Unknown to anyone beforehand, Fundamental Data attended the town hall to answer questions — the first time company representatives had been seen in public since the project was announced more than a year earlier.

During the meeting, they delivered some bombshells: plans involving 10,000 acres across multiple sites, a second gas plant, a nuclear plant in Grant County, a massive solar installation, 1,500 acres of data centers, the use of mine water for cooling, 5,000 construction jobs and liquefied natural gas storage.

The main speakers from Fundamental Data were Scott Wyland

and Lewis Reynolds. They were perceived by many attendees as arrogant and condescending. They did not offer a single way in which they wanted to be part of the community or describe any specific benefits they would bring to the area. They also dismissed claims that emissions from the plant would impact people's health.

The following day, they participated in a “meet and greet” at Blackwater Falls State Park with the WV Department of Commerce, both mayors, the county commissioners and select local citizens. Two representatives from Tucker United were invited at the last minute and no press was allowed to attend.

The group also visited the project site.

The Ridgeline project and HB 2014 also remained key topics during recent discussions between local residents and state lawmakers.

Tucker County Sens. Randy Smith and Jay Taylor attended a leg-

islative update in Parsons on June 2, 2026, and approximately 50 people were in attendance. According to those who attended, much of the discussion centered on HB 2014 and the Ridgeline Project.

Sen. Smith was questioned about the lack of progress on changes to HB 2014 and local control during the most recent legislative session. Country Roads News provided an update: “Opposition to Data Center Dominates WV Legislative Update.”

As legal challenges continue and new developments emerge, public involvement remains critical. We encourage you to stay informed, follow Tucker United and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, share updates with friends and neighbors and continue asking questions about decisions that will shape the future of Tucker County.

This effort has always been driven by people who care deeply about their communities, their public lands, and the places they call home. Whether by attending meetings, speaking with elected officials, supporting local organizations or simply helping spread the word, every action makes a difference.

If you are able, please consider becoming a member of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. Memberships start at just \$15 per year and your support helps provide the resources to continue protecting West Virginia's lands, waters and communities.

The challenges ahead are significant, but so is the commitment of the people working to meet them. Together, we can continue advocating for the protection of Tucker County.

Remembering our friend, Rafe Pomerance

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is mourning the loss of Rafe Pomerance, a longtime member, colleague and friend whose life's work helped shape the modern climate movement and whose presence deeply influenced both our organization and my own path into environmental advocacy.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's communications coordinator Jordan Howes reflects on Rafe not only as a nationally significant climate leader, but as a mentor and steady presence during her early years in this field.

When I came into environmental advocacy in 2024, I did not yet have a deep background in the work or an established network in the movement. I was still learning how these systems functioned and where I could fit into them. Rafe was one of the first people who made that space feel accessible.

I first encountered his name after joining the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, when I began learning more about the people and history shaping climate and conservation work. At the time, I did not yet connect his name to the full scope of his decades-long influence on climate policy. That understand-



Rafe Pomerance delivering his presentation at the 2025 WVHC Fall Review.
(Photo by Mark Moody, WV Mon Media)

ing came later, as I worked more directly alongside him.

I first met him through Go North Alliance calls, where I quickly realized I was speaking with someone whose experience had helped shape major chapters of climate policy. Despite that history, he carried himself with humility and an openness that made it easy to engage with him directly. He never made the work feel out of reach or intimidating.

Over the past several years, Rafe served as a steady presence in

the Go North Alliance, the coalition working toward securing a northern alternative for Corridor H from Parsons to Davis. In those meetings, he was often the de facto facilitator—helping guide conversations, offering historical context and consistently pushing discussions toward constructive next steps. Working alongside him in that capacity was both grounding and instructive.

It was during that time that I suggested him as a speaker for the West Virginia Highlands Conser-

vancy's 2025 Fall Review, where he delivered a presentation titled "The Launch of the Climate Movement and Where We Go From Here." Hearing him speak in person made clear just how much experience, perspective and history he carried into every room he entered.

Rafe's environmental career began in 1972 with work on urban environmental issues. In 1973, he launched the National Clean Air Coalition and served as its coordinator for five years, helping build early momentum for stronger air pollution protections. By 1975, he joined Friends of the Earth to advocate for clean air reforms and later served as its president into the early 1980s. In the late 1980s, he became a key figure in international climate policy, including early efforts to establish global emissions reduction targets that helped shape the trajectory of climate action worldwide. He later served in the Clinton administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Environment and Development, contributing to U.S. climate policy and international negotiations that would inform the Kyoto Protocol. In more recent years, he continued his work as a Distinguished Senior Arctic Policy Fellow at the Woodwell Climate Research Center.

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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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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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Remembering our friend, Rafe Pomerance

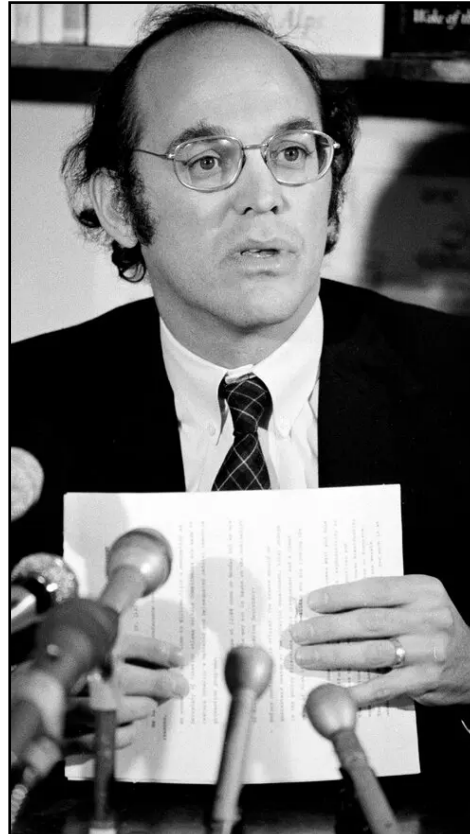
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At every stage of that long career, what stood out to me most in our conversations was not only his knowledge, but his humility. He made space for questions. He made space for learning. And he treated the work not as something finished, but as something that still required people willing to stay engaged.

One of his most enduring messages came at the close of his Fall Review presentation, when he quoted Joe Hill: “Don’t mourn. Organize.” It is a line that carries so much volume and it feels even more meaningful now.

Olivia Miller, interim executive director of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, shared her own reflection on Rafe’s passing: “I’m incredibly lucky to have crossed paths with Rafe and be able to call him one of my greatest teachers and friends. His ambition was boundless, and to him, there was no challenge too big to overcome. Rafe stood ten toes down for the cause in every way, and I learned so much from his wisdom, wit, and courage. We all owe a huge thanks to Rafe for his life of advocacy to protect all living beings. You are deeply missed, my friend.”

I also share my own gratitude in this moment. I first worked at the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy beginning in 2024, and Rafe was already part of the broader work I was stepping into through Go North Alliance conversations and organizational partnerships. As



I learned more about his history and contributions, it became clear just how foundational his role had been in shaping the climate movement long before I encountered him.

That understanding only deepened as I worked alongside him. Rafe was not only a figure in the history of the movement, but a generous presence within it. He was someone willing to engage, to explain and to encourage those of us still learning how to contribute meaningfully.

I am deeply grateful to have known him, to have learned from him and to have worked alongside him. His guidance helped shape my understanding of what long-term environmental advocacy requires, especially here in West Virginia.

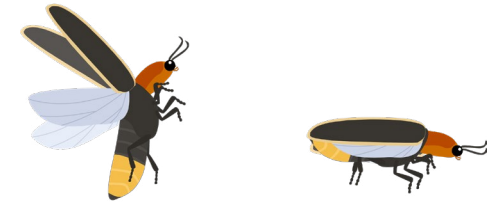
He will be deeply missed, and his words, example and commitment will continue to guide the work we carry forward.

Off the beaten path: The what, when, where and why around synchronized fireflies

By Cindy Berdine, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

What are fireflies, lightning bugs or European glow-worms? Well, they are not flies at all; they are beetles in the family Lampyridae. In West Virginia, there are more than 31 confirmed species of lightning bugs. Unfortunately, due to habitat loss, light pollution, human activity and pesticides, their lifespan can vary. Depending on their luminosity and life cycle, they may survive in the larvae stage for up to two years. On average, they live only one year in the wild. There are over 2,400 species of lightning bugs worldwide. Synchronized Fireflies are a rare species known as *Photinus carolinus*. There are around 12 species of synchronized fireflies in the world and three known species in North America.

When does this spectacular nightlife phenomenon happen? It occurs anywhere from mid-May to mid-June and can last through August. The whole process depends on the weather. Ideal life cycle conditions include hot, humid nights with random dense patches of forest, warm tall grass, soil and water. Synchronized fireflies have a four-part life cycle that begins with eggs, followed by larvae, pupa and adult. During their adult stage, they flash for about 20 minutes a night for two



weeks and that is it!

Where does this laser light show take place? This beautiful, magical event happens in West Virginia and continues into the Smoky Mountains.

Why does this phenomenon happen? Males flash their lights in perfect, unison usually five to eight times, to attract a mate. Each species has its own light pattern depending on the species and it is interesting to note that not all lightning bugs produce light. The synchronized fireflies’ male-to-female ratio is 100-to-1. Excess light pollution in an area has can interfere with the communication during mating season, causing disruptions in their signaling pattern. Once a habitat is destroyed, sometimes the population may never recover. Leaf litter helps produce ideal areas for egg laying and for larvae to thrive. After the male flashes five to eight times, there are about five to eight seconds of total darkness. During this time, the female is waiting in the grass and then responds with two quick blinks to signal her exact location.

While the primary purpose of their glow is to provide mating signals, fireflies serve as an enchanting reminder of the simple joys in life, encouraging moments of reflection and appreciation for nature’s beauty. This spectacular pulsing light show is something everyone should witness at least once as an adult. It is an unstoppable light show that hopefully future generations will get to experience as well.

Updates from the WVHC: Need, greed and the work ahead

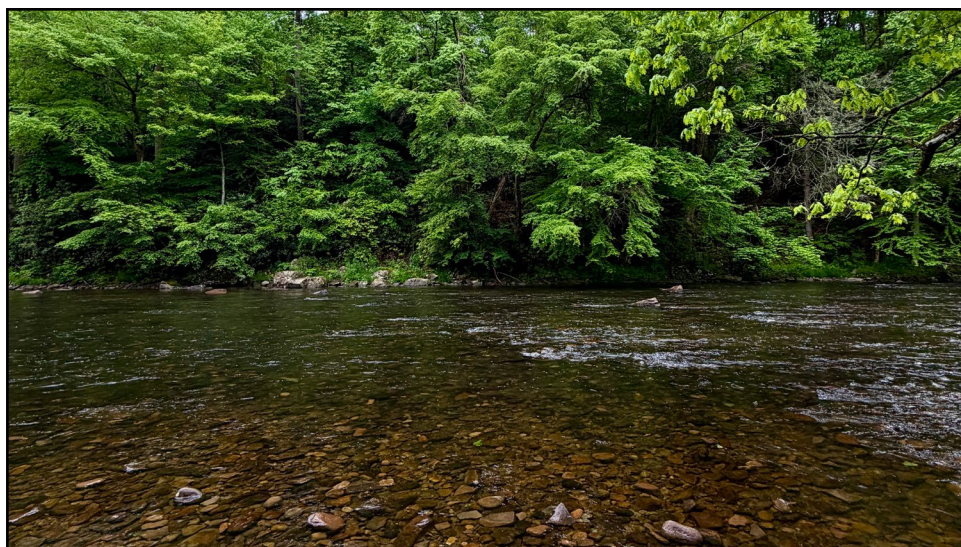
By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

West Virginia has always given more than its fair share. Our mountains, forests, rivers, and communities have powered industries, enriched corporations, and sustained generations. But there is a difference between meeting real needs and feeding endless greed. As we enter the second half of 2026, that sentiment feels especially relevant.

Across the Highlands and beyond, wealthy out-of-state corporations are once again promising prosperity while asking our communities to accept the familiar costs— more fossil fuel extraction, dirtier air and water, greater public health risks, and fewer meaningful opportunities for local people to shape what happens in their own backyards.

Since March 2025, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has been engaged in advocacy, community organizing, and legal work around Fundamental Data's proposed development across Tucker and Grant counties. The proposal made by the amateurish and boom-chasing venture has raised serious concerns for our members and neighbors, including the possibility of thousands of acres of data centers, multiple power plants, and long-term impacts to the communities, public lands, waters, and landscapes that make this region so special.

In this issue of The Highlands Voice, WVHC Board Member Luanne McGovern shares a timely update on what we recently learned when representatives from Fundamental Data made a surprise appearance at a May town hall in Davis. She also provides a broader look at



data center development news from across the state.

One of the most alarming revelations from that town hall was that Fundamental Data is no longer talking about just one methane-gas power plant. Representatives described plans that could include two methane-gas power plants and, somewhere down the line, a nuclear power plant as well.

Just weeks later, the Trump administration announced hundreds of millions of dollars in federal support for the coal industry under the Defense Production Act, a 1950 Cold War-era law intended for national defense-related industries. That announcement included support for new coal-fired generation, including a project proposed for Mt. Storm in Grant County.

At a time when West Virginians across the state are already struggling with high electric bills, it is deeply frustrating to see state and federal leaders doubling down on the very industries and systems that have helped create the problem. We will continue to share updates as we learn more about these proposals, but for now, we remain deeply con-

cerned by the possibility of multiple new power plants across Tucker and Grant counties. We will need your support as we continue pushing back.

This is also happening against the backdrop of the Environmental Protection Agency's repeal of the endangerment finding, which has long provided a key legal and scientific foundation for regulating greenhouse gas pollution. The repeal weakens federal climate protections at a moment when communities are already facing the consequences of a warming planet. It is another example of policy being shaped for the benefit of a few powerful industries rather than the health, safety, and future of the many.

Earlier this year, the Conservancy joined a national lawsuit to help defend the endangerment finding, and that case is now making its way through the courts.

We are also continuing our work in the Cherry River watershed, where the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection granted "advance approval" to two mining companies seeking to take over South Fork Coal Company's permits

for operations near the Monongahela National Forest. Those operations include the haul road through part of the forest that the Conservancy and our coalition partners have been fighting for the past three years.

On June 1, Appalachian Voices, the Conservancy, and the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance submitted a complaint and public comment to WVDEP documenting that neither ClearCo and Aurevo nor South Fork Coal Company, the current permittee, has authorization from the U.S. Forest Service to operate within the Monongahela National Forest. Likewise, none of the coal companies has the necessary determination of "valid existing rights" from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to impact national forest land.

This is especially troubling because the Conservancy and our partners shared this information directly with WVDEP officials just weeks before the advance approvals were granted.

Still, amid these difficult fights, there is plenty of good work and good news to share.

The stewardship arm of the Conservancy is alive and well, and it continues to bring amazing volunteers into service for our public lands. In early May, we welcomed the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Class of 2026. Twenty-five new and returning volunteers gathered at the Seneca Rocks Discovery Center for new steward training, our annual picnic, and a volunteer recognition program.

This summer, we hope you will

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Updates from the WVHC: Need, greed and the work ahead

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see their smiling faces and green vests at the Red Creek, Blackbird Knob, and Sundew Trail trailheads, helping visitors enjoy Dolly Sods responsibly and safely.

As you will also see in this issue, we launched a limited-edition t-shirt celebrating the “50+1” anniversary of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area. We were lucky to work with the talented artist Harris Wright on an incredible design honoring Dolly Sods and all its beauty. A few shirts are still available, so make sure to grab one before they sell out.

Preparations are also underway for the 2026 Fall Review, scheduled for October 23–24 at Canaan Valley Resort State Park. It is shaping up to be another special gathering, with guided hikes in Dolly Sods and Canaan Valley Resort State Park, conversations about culture and community, updates on data centers, water, and legislation, and a screening of Dolly Sods and the Legacy of Helen McGinnis. We would love to see you there, and we will continue sharing details as plans come together.

My encouragement for everyone today, and always, is to get outside and enjoy as much of our wild and wonderful state as you can. Stay grounded in its beauty and peacefulness. Draw strength from its mountains, forests, rivers, and communities for the road ahead.

Together, we can work toward a future where people and nature thrive.

If this work matters to you, I hope you will consider supporting the Conservancy with a donation. Your gift helps us continue the legal, organizing, communications, and public education work needed to meet this moment. Together, we can make sure West Virginians have the information, tools, and support they need to speak up for the places and communities they love.

What we’ve been doing to fight the good fight:

- Launched a new video update series to keep people informed about the latest developments around the Tucker County data center and power plant proposals.
- Joined a national lawsuit to defend the endangerment finding.
- Submitted a public comment and complaint to the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection regarding coal operations in the Cherry River watershed moving forward without necessary approvals.
- Filed a lawsuit with West Virginia Rivers Coalition against Amsted Graphite Materials in Anmoore, West Virginia, over alleged repeated Clean Water Act violations.
- Launched a limited-edition T-shirt celebrating “50+1 years” of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Area.
- Welcomed the 2026 class of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards.

U.S. House committee rejects Moore’s funding proposal for drinking water in Southern West Virginia

By Henry Culvyhouse, Mountain State Spotlight

Moore asked the House Appropriations Committee for \$50 million to help get his constituents in Southern West Virginia clean water. The House voted down his request.

Rep. Riley Moore, R-W.Va., held a jar of brown water from the home of McDowell County resident Teldia Haywood in the House Appropriations Committee room Wednesday as he pleaded for clean water.

“This right here, this jar, is water that comes out of a faucet in West Virginia,” Moore said.

As Moore made his pitch for \$50 million in funds — \$200 million less than a proposal he said he’d champion — his staff distributed jugs and bottles of water, each sampled from a tap in McDowell County.

He said the people of Southern West Virginia, who provided coal to power the rise of America, are owed clean water.

“All they’re asking for is clean water. They’re simply asking to be seen as citizens. Fellow citizens who deserve to be able to pour a clean glass of water for their children and their grandchildren,” Moore said.



Despite the samples, despite the plea, the House Appropriations Committee said no.

They voted his amendment down via voice vote, which means their names aren’t recorded with their position.

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, said the request wasn’t appropriate because it didn’t go through the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies subcommittee, which he chairs.

“I’m not disputing that West Virginia has water infrastructure needs,” he said. “A proposal like this needs to be properly vetted.”

However, Moore and his fellow West Virginia Representative Carol Miller had requested \$250 million be earmarked for West Virginia. Simpson’s committee chose not to include that in their version of the bill last month.

Simpson said he would work with Moore as the budget bill moves forward.

Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, the ranking member on Simpson’s committee, suggested Moore should try to go a different route to get the money.

“My colleague from New Jersey will be proposing an amendment to increase money for state revolving funds benefiting all of our states, and I encourage the gentleman from

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U.S. House committee rejects Moore's funding proposal for drinking water in Southern West Virginia

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West Virginia, and everyone here, to support that amendment," she said. "I oppose this amendment."

But the committee also rejected, via voice vote, the amendment to increase money for water and sewer funds offered by Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman, D-N.J.

The Rev. Caitlin Ware, who has helped organize activism around water issues in the Southern Coalfields, said lawmakers failed to help their fellow Americans.

"They recognize a region of people that doesn't have water, and that it's the worst water in America, and they still chose to do nothing," she said.

Ware, and other organizers with the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, are now looking to Sen. Jim Justice and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito to secure funding for the coalfields.

Haywood provided Moore the jar he displayed to the committee when the congressman and a few staff members came to her house last week. She said the lawmakers need to act now.

She said, "They need to do something about this, because so far, nobody's been doing their job."

Trump to pump \$700M into coal power in the states, as he again blasts renewable energy

By Jacob Fischler, West Virginia Watch

The federal government will spend \$700 million on building or refurbishing coal power infrastructure across the country in a boost to "clean, beautiful coal," President Donald Trump said Thursday in the Oval Office.

Trump said he was invoking the Cold War-era Defense Production Act, which gives the president authority over domestic industry, to save 13 existing power plants and build two new ones. He said the move would save 14,000 coal jobs and lower energy costs, though the spending will not lower the price of gasoline or diesel fuel, which has spiked since Trump launched a war with Iran in February.

Trump criticized subsidies for wind power championed by Democrats, including his predecessor, Joe Biden, characterizing coal as the most important energy source to cultivate.

"It's real power," Trump said. "In terms of power, there's really nothing like it. We have so many different alternatives. You talk about some, there's no real alternative."

New coal plants would be built in Alaska and West Virginia, Trump said. A defunct plant in Maryland would also be restarted. Those proj-



ects would be funded with \$200 million in Department of Energy grants.

Coal plants receiving a combined \$425 million in Defense Production Act funding are in West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Indiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Arizona, Oklahoma, North Dakota and Wisconsin, according to the White House.

Coal mines benefiting from the move are in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wyoming, North Dakota and New Mexico, according to the White House.

The administration would also spend \$75 million, authorized by the Defense Production Act, to help open a long-delayed new coal export terminal in Oakland, California, the White House said.

Administration officials said Thursday's announcement built on a record of the past 18 months in which the administration has saved dozens of coal production facilities.

"It is hard to overstate the magnitude of this," Energy Secretary Chris Wright said. "If you look at our efforts across the whole government, so far 45 coal plants are open today that would not be open."

Republican approval

Trump Cabinet members, congressional Republicans and two

governors, Wyoming's Mark Gordon and West Virginia's Patrick Morrissey, joined Trump for the Oval Office announcement, with several extolling the importance of the coal industry after Trump spoke.

Wright, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin praised Trump for intervening to help the industry and refocusing federal energy policy away from renewables.

Wright said Democratic policies were more responsible for high energy costs than the war in Iran, even though Republicans have held unified control of the federal government since January 2025 and the Trump administration has consistently touted its moves to encourage fossil fuel production.

"We wish they were lower, but gasoline prices in the U.S. are a little over \$4. They're \$10 in Europe, they're higher in Asia, they're very high in California," Wright said. The national average price for regular gasoline Thursday was \$4.24 per gallon.

"The bigger threat to energy prices in the United States is Democratic green energy policies," Wright continued. "They have driven up en-

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Save the Date for WVHC's 2026 Fall Review: "From Ridges to Rivers: Safeguarding What Sustains Us"

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

This fall, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy invites conservationists, advocates and community members from across the region to gather in the highlands for a weekend of learning, reflection and connection.

Mark your calendars for **Oct. 23–25**, when WVHC's annual Fall Review returns—this time at Canaan Valley Resort in Davis, West Virginia—under the theme **"From Ridges to Rivers: Safeguarding What Sustains Us."**

From the forested ridgelines that define Appalachia's skyline to the streams and rivers that sustain our communities and wildlife, the landscapes we cherish are deeply interconnected. The 2026 Fall Re-



Fall landscape of Canaan Valley in Davis, WV.

view will explore how we protect these vital systems—and the people who depend on them—in the face of growing environmental pressures.

Set against the sweeping views of Canaan Valley, the weekend will

bring together environmental leaders, scientists, advocates, and concerned citizens to share ideas, build partnerships, and strengthen the movement to protect West Virginia's lands and waters.

As always, our Fall Review will offer opportunities to dig into the issues shaping our region's future while also enjoying the outdoors and the company of fellow conservationists. Whether you're a long-time supporter or new to WVHC's work, this gathering is a chance to recharge, reconnect, and recommit to the work ahead.

We're currently developing the weekend's program and will share more details—including speakers, sessions, and activities—in the coming months.

For now, save the date and plan to join us in beautiful Canaan Valley this October for a weekend dedicated to protecting the ridges, rivers and communities that sustain us all.

Registration information will be announced soon.

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 virtue of “Intelligence Centers”

By C.A. Holmes

In the grand scheme of culture and politics in 2026, you would be forgiven for thinking environmental pursuits are not the most pressing issues facing the country. Compared with ongoing and impending wars, an ever-rising cost of living and a rogue Supreme Court, there’s almost too much happening to focus on any one thing.

Over the last year, though, a common thread seems to reveal itself consistently across nearly all issues. Our governments, from the national level to the local level, by and large are prioritizing commerce over the public good.

This pivot to a more brazen government money grab reminds me of something musician David Bazan wrote: “If it isn’t making dollars, then it isn’t making sense. If you aren’t moving units, then you’re not worth the expense.”

This isn’t necessarily news. Capitalism can be adverse to the public good and has often required regulation to alleviate predatory behavior, most notably through labor



and antitrust laws. I won’t bore you with a history lesson on unionization and trust-busting, but I do want to dive into what may be their 21st-century analog: Big Tech’s AI and data centers, or, according to the governor of West Virginia, “intelligence centers.”

Big Tech refers primarily to the five largest technology companies in the world: Microsoft, Apple,

Amazon, Alphabet (Google) and Meta (Facebook). All five of these companies rely on existing data center infrastructure to run their servers and provide cloud storage to their users.

This isn’t anything new. What is new is the push to build additional data centers to manage the potential usage demands of their AI product rollouts.

So why should you care? How does this affect you?

To put it plainly, our governments are providing tax incentives, nonpublic permits, land leases and resources to projects that will have definitive effects on our land, water and air quality. Data centers require a copious amount of energy and water. Some of that energy will be drawn from the existing grid, while many operators are building gas-fired power plants on-site to meet their energy needs.

Furthermore, the function of these “intelligence centers” is to further the capabilities of a software technology that has proven to be unreliable, biased, unpredictable and manipulative. Not to mention, the entire premise echoes multiple science-fiction films including 2001: A Space Odyssey, The Terminator series, Avengers: Age of Ultron, Blade Runner and The Matrix.

Many states across the country have begun to put forth legislation limiting or halting data center

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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 christa.clasgens@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/WVHCemailsignup**

The virtue of “Intelligence Centers”

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expansion. In Maine, the state Legislature passed LD 307, providing a moratorium on data center construction until November 2027. The bill was ultimately vetoed by the governor, who cited the lack of a specific exemption she desired. Consequently, the House failed to override the veto.

Michigan, a state already possessing between 65 and 70 operational data centers, has proposed HB 5594, which would establish the Data Center Regulation Act and provide a one-year moratorium on construction.

Maryland has passed the Utility RELIEF Act, imposing tax and energy restrictions on all data centers.

Delaware became the first state to pass specific transparency laws regarding data centers with SB 312. The bill prohibits state agencies, counties and municipalities from using nondisclosure agreements for data centers using 100 megawatts or more, thereby bringing public review into the process.

All of these states are engaged in internal debates, with pro- and anti-data center legislation being proposed during nearly every legislative session. West Virginia, on the other hand, seems to have no such internal struggle due to its su-

permajority House and Senate and a governor whose point of view has been made blatantly clear despite growing public concern.

In March, Gov. Patrick Morrisey said at a press conference announcing that Alphabet would be breaking ground on a 1,700-acre data center in Putnam County: “This is exactly the kind of opportunity we are working to bring here — one that creates jobs, strengthens infrastructure and positions West Virginia for long-term growth.”

Data centers notoriously have fewer than 20 permanent positions per site on average due to their operational needs. As a result, lawmakers consistently reference the number of construction jobs each site will require rather than the more honest long-term employment figures.

West Virginia seems determined to repeat past sins and offer up our land, health and quality of life in favor of short-sighted economic “growth.” The state continues passing tax incentives and repealing regulations under the guise of moving West Virginia forward while, in reality, betting our future on a story we’ve seen the ending of before.

Gov. Morrisey has changed the signs at the state’s borders to say, “Open for Business,” where they once said, “Wild and Wonderful.” I think this says everything about our government’s priorities.

Commerce over the public good.

Trump to pump \$700M into coal power in the states, as he again blasts renewable energy

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ergy prices far more than a conflict in Iran.”

Burgum said the president was perhaps the strongest advocate for coal in the country’s history.

He echoed Trump’s statements that the coal industry needed to be reinvigorated after the Biden administration focused more on renewable energy production.

“The prior administration, under Biden, had gone so far down the path of pursuing the highly subsidized, intermittent, weather-dependent sources of electricity that our grid was at risk. You understood that and you understood how key coal is,” Burgum told Trump. “It’s the backbone of having affordable, reliable and secure American energy to power our country, our electric grid, power our competitiveness in AI, and power all the manufacturing that’s coming back.”

Morrissey said the moves would benefit his state.

“We believe your policies are going to allow America to compete and win,” Morrissey said. “West Virginia is going to supply the coal,

the gas, the nuclear to help make that happen. So I’m very excited by everything you’re doing.”

Greens decry ‘polluter hand-out’

Environmental groups blasted the move, saying it propped up a failing industry and would have little long-term impact on energy prices or reliability.

Jesse Lee, a senior adviser with the advocacy group Climate Power, said the spending on coal projects would not lower utility prices, which he said have climbed 18% during Trump’s second term.

“He’s gaslighting the American people by claiming that this move will lower electricity prices in the middle of an energy affordability crisis that he created,” Lee said.

Environmental groups noted the coal industry heavily contributed to Trump’s 2024 campaign.

Several environmental advocates, including Lena Moffitt, the executive director of the climate group Evergreen Action, suggested that relationship drove Trump to promote coal at the expense of renewable energy sources.

“Spending \$700 million to bail out the coal industry is like throwing a lifeline to a ship that has already sunk,” Moffitt wrote. “Trump is handing out taxpayer money to coal barons and leaving us with nothing but higher energy costs. ... There’s no coal revival waiting around the corner—just polluters collecting a handout while their friends run the White House and Americans foot the bill.”



These mountains bring us together.
Now they need us to stand together.
*Help protect the Highlands from data center
expansion.*

donate today at wvhighlands.org



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