

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy
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The Highlands Voice

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Updates from WVHC: Celebrating our mountains and the work ahead

By Olivia Miller, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Fall has been exceptionally beautiful in the Highlands this year. Every season in West Virginia brings its own wonders, but when our mountains turn fiery red, orange, and gold, their beauty is nearly impossible to ignore. It reassures me that we can build a future for our state that protects the places we love. Even as proposals for new industries threaten to tie us more tightly to our extractive past, these mountains remain beloved by people here at home, across the country, and around the world.

That love is helping sustain a growing part of our economy. A recent report from the Governor’s Office highlighted the contributions of



Scenic fall views of Canaan Valley. (Photo donated by Kent Mason)

outdoor recreation and tourism to West Virginia’s future. In 2025, the

impact and welcomed 78.4 million visitors, a 1.6% increase over 2024.

The industry now supports 61,728 jobs—one in every 15 jobs in the state. State and local tax revenue generated by visitor spending amounted to the equivalent of nearly \$882 in tax relief for every West Virginia household. These numbers are another reminder that protecting our mountains, rivers, and forests is an investment in our communities and their future.

Few people have helped others appreciate these landscapes as generously as Mountain State photographer Kent Mason. We are grateful to share that Kent recently donated a portion of his landscape photography collection to the West Virginia

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Updates from WVHC: Celebrating our mountains and the work ahead

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Highlands Conservancy.

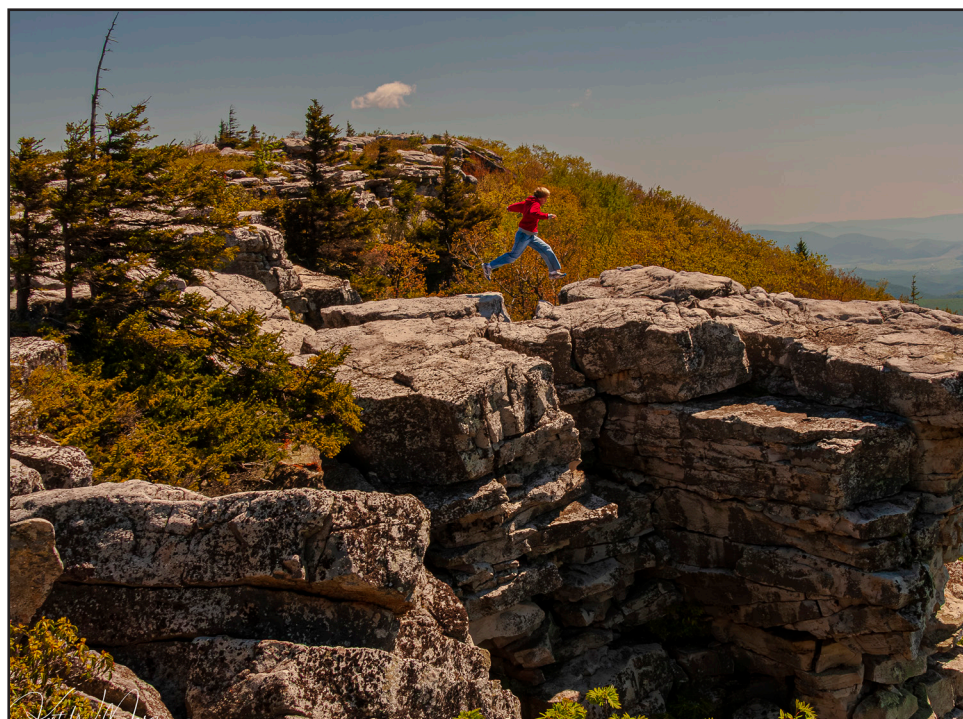
Kent has spent decades exploring the Highlands, capturing striking images of West Virginia's wildlife, people, habitats, and treasured landscapes. Readers will recognize his work from the pages of *The Highlands Voice*, the ninth edition of the *Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide*, and the second edition of *The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands* by Dr. Jim Van Gundy. Both books are available in our online store at wvhighlands.org.

Kent's photographs remind us what we are working to protect and invite more people to care about the natural world. We look forward to sharing more of his images with you soon. Thank you, Kent, for your generosity and your enduring love of our mountains!

There will also be an opportunity to enjoy these landscapes together at our upcoming Fall Review, Oct. 23–24 at Canaan Valley Resort State Park. If you are craving time outdoors and connection with others who care about protecting the Highlands, I hope you will join us. The weekend will include guided hikes, advocacy training, updates on the Conservancy's work, and a silent auction fundraiser supporting our mission. You can view the full schedule and register online at wvhighlands.org



Photo of Kent Mason camping in Dolly Sods. (Photo donated by Kent Mason)



A child exploring rocky terrain within Dolly Sods. (Photo donated by Kent Mason)

I am especially excited to welcome this year's keynote speaker, Eileen Flanagan. A Quaker author, speaker, activist, and nationally

recognized nonviolence trainer, Eileen helps people make their activism more effective and spiritually grounded. She has held leadership

roles in three climate campaigns, including an effort that pressured a \$4 billion-a-year bank to pause its financing of mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia. Her latest book, *Common Ground: How the Crisis of the Earth Is Saving Us from Our Illusion of Separation*, explores how confronting the ecological crisis can help us rediscover our connection to one another and the living world.

Eileen will also lead an advocacy workshop based on the *Four Roles of Social Change*. As new fights emerge over data centers, transmission lines, fossil fuel infrastructure, and environmental deregulation, the workshop will help participants understand how change happens and the different roles people can play. There is a place for everyone in the work ahead, whether you have spent decades advocating for the Highlands or are just getting involved.

I hope you will join us in Canaan to celebrate our mountains, learn from one another, and find renewed energy for the work of protecting them.

Olivia Miller

Interim Executive Director
West Virginia Highlands
Conservancy

**Register
for the
Fall
Review!**



Go North Alliance newsletter: Delayed again

By Go North Alliance

The West Virginia Division of Highways (DOH) has announced another delay of the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Parsons to Davis section of Corridor H. Instead of Oct. 5, it is now supposed to be released on Nov. 5, 2026. This is the shortest delay yet, so they seem to be getting closer.

DOH staff have told Go North that the SDEIS will include a study of both the DOH's Revised Original Preferred Alignment (ROPA) and a northern alignment. We remain hopeful that DOH is studying both with the same thoroughness, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

As a reminder, the ROPA would be built between the towns of Davis and Thomas. A separate truck route is proposed around Thomas that would connect US 219 North and WV 32. The Northern Route we support would pass north of Thomas, avoiding the entire area between the towns. There would be no truck route with all its extra problems.

The Go North Alliance is NOT trying to stop the corridor, but rather is advocating for the best route for our communities and surrounding environment. Those of us who live, work, and play in Tucker County are

major stakeholders in what happens here. And there's a lot at stake! **The ROPA would:**

- Disrupt daily life on our mountaintop forever. The route is proposed to go under Route 32 between Davis and Thomas, with a new overpass built for 32. This is not a simple project. Look how long it took to get the sewers replaced in Davis. Now imagine the noise, mess, and disruption of a multi-year effort to build the overpass and four-lane beneath for the corridor. Picture extended delays getting your kids to and from school or heading to the facilities at Blackwater Ridge (Cortland Acres), or to Shop-n-Save. Daily delays. For years.
- Add to that the long-term delays caused by the proposed truck route. Again, years of disruptive construction and noise. Right past the school. Right past the library.
- And with the way the truck route around Thomas is proposed, all of the trucks coming from the north to get on the Corridor will be required to make two left turns - one from the truck route onto 32, and another from 32 onto the access road for the ramps to the Corridor. Picture getting stuck behind one of these left-turning trucks. That change

will be forever.

- Not only would a poorly-sited project disrupt the lives of all of us who live here, but it would have a serious negative impact on our thriving tourist economy. Those who visit here come to escape the noise and congestion of cities, to find a peaceful place for outdoor recreation and to enjoy small, quiet, quaint mountain towns, not to vacation smack in the middle of the same mess they left behind.

For all of us, the impacts go beyond the construction. **The ROPA could:**

- Add noise and light pollution to Blackwater Falls State Park (which is in the process of applying for International Dark Sky certification).
- Negatively impact the protected historic areas of the Blackwater Industrial Complex, with the planned placement of a massive bridge over the North Fork of the Blackwater River at Coketon. Further, the blasting and construction effort for the bridge could add acid mine drainage to the North Fork.
- Irreparably damage the ecologically important and sensitive wetlands along the proposed route, including Big Run Bog.

There is an alternative. A bet-

ter alternative. A northern alignment will avoid all of the above issues, while still achieving the connection goals of Corridor H. ***And, despite persistent misinformation to the contrary, a northern alignment can be designed and built to avoid Thomas's watershed/water supply.***

Once the SDEIS is published, there will be a required public comment period, and the Go North Alliance will notify you of when this happens. Make your views known. Life as we know it on our mountaintop is at stake.

P.S. For good reasons, Go North has focused on the highway's impacts and benefits for our towns, historic sites, the State Park – the entire area on the mountain. We haven't talked as much about ROPA's route from Mackeyville to the high school. So DOH claims that we must support their alternative. Not true.

That section's narrow, difficult terrain, with its unstable geology and National Forest-protected species, has no room for a four-lane. Less destructive improvements can be made. We have seen Corridor H construction failures between Elkins and Parsons as a warning. So should the DOH.

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): \$22.50
- WVHC Hemp Hat (Black or Green): \$25.00
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Please include \$6.25 shipping for Apparel items

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- 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 40, Granville, WV 26534. 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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West Virginia considers nuclear waste storage, then backs off

By John McFerrin, *West Virginia Highlands Conservancy*

West Virginia has made a brief, if mostly behind-the-scenes, foray into nuclear energy. The effort produced a lot of talk, charges and countercharges, and acrimony, but not much else.

The step West Virginia took was to seek to participate in the U.S. Department of Energy's Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus program. The department describes the program this way: "Proposed campuses could support activities across the full nuclear fuel lifecycle, including fuel fabrication, enrichment, reprocessing used nuclear fuel, and disposition of waste. Depending on state priorities and regional capabilities, the sites could also host advanced reactor deployment, power generation, advanced manufacturing, and co located data centers."

In the name of jobs and economic development, West Virginia was one of six states that sought to have one of these campuses located within its borders. As soon as that became public, feathers flew.

The Charleston Gazette-Mail reported that West Virginia had sought one of these Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campuses, including the possibility that such a campus would involve nuclear waste storage. This made the governor's office indignant, insisting that West Virginia would never be a dumping ground for nuclear waste.

The Gazette-Mail followed up with documentation. It quoted West Virginia's application, which

included the possibility of storing nuclear waste: "West Virginia proposes to serve as the nation's central hub for nuclear fuel recycling, interim storage, and long-term materials stewardship."

The application even identified potential sites for a campus, although it did not specifically say where the nuclear waste would be stored. It said only, "West Virginia is currently considering a range of sites." It went on to identify eight sites under consideration.

Soon afterward, West Virginia abandoned its efforts to secure a Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus.

To be selected by the U.S. Department of Energy for one of these campuses, West Virginia had to make certain commitments. Selection was not guaranteed. West Virginia had to persuade the department that it was a suitable candidate. To do this, it combined partial truths and wishful thinking. A review of those commitments reveals something about the state's approach to the process.

As part of its application, West Virginia stated, "The State's existing energy infrastructure and technical workforce have historically served as a critical pillar for all methods of domestic energy production, including nuclear energy." The part about existing energy infrastructure may be true; the claim that West Virginia's experience includes nuclear energy reduces the statement to about a one-sixteenth truth.

The application also contains some wishful thinking: "West Virginia is approaching nuclear energy with enthusiasm, recognizing its po-

tential to become a national leader in the sector. The state is strategically positioning itself to develop the infrastructure needed to support a full, end-to-end Innovation Campus in the future."

That enthusiasm seemed to dissipate as soon as the plan became public. The application also describes "bi-partisan support for advanced nuclear energy facilities." It does not cite any source for this conclusion.

West Virginia's pitch was built around two things. First, there is regulatory flexibility. The application promises "a regulatory environment primed for flexible nuclear development." Second, it offers what it calls "financial incentives."

"Through mechanisms like loan guarantees, direct loans, tax credits, and public-private partnerships, the government shares risks with investors, mobilizing large-scale private capital for infrastructure development."

A loose translation: West Virginia will pay the nuclear industry to come here and will not scrutinize it too closely once it arrives.

The application also points to Senate Bill 2014, the law that facilitated data centers and limited opportunities for public participation and local control. West Virginia's argument is that if it made such changes to accommodate data centers, it could do the same for a nuclear campus.

The application recognizes that local opposition could arise and would need to be addressed. It talks extensively about the need for

community participation, communication with local stakeholders and other forms of engagement.

The framing of this discussion is enlightening. As part of its discussion of community involvement, West Virginia observes that West Virginians are accustomed to large-scale energy development. Having become accustomed to large-scale energy developments, West Virginians would presumably be agreeable to another large-scale energy development, this time nuclear.

Another loose translation: These people put up with mountaintop removal; they will put up with anything.

The application does consider, and reject, the idea of storing nuclear waste in old underground coal mines. It mentions favorably the possibility of using old strip mines but rejects the idea of storing waste in abandoned underground mines. Although West Virginia has plenty of these, the application says they are unsuitable for waste storage because they are too unstable, may contain methane and can hold water, among other concerns.

The idea of storing nuclear waste in abandoned coal mines resurfaces every few years, so it is worth noting that West Virginia's own application rejected that possibility.

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a WVHC
Member!**



Off the beaten path: Fall, autumn and beautiful colors

By Cindy Slater, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Fall is my favorite season of the year. There is something cozy about wearing your favorite sweater and breathing in the crisp, cool autumn air. The aroma of fall surrounds you as you walk in the woods or, if you are lucky, when you step outside your front door. During the summer months, there is so much moisture in the air that smells often get muddled. When fall arrives and humidity drops, fallen leaves on the ground start to decompose with the help of bacteria and fungi found in the soil. The gases released during this process produce that sweet, familiar smell of fall.

When temperatures drop significantly at night and the days grow shorter, trees send a signal to seal off the veins that carry nutrients to the leaves, trapping sugars produced during sunny autumn days. This process prepares the tree for dormancy during the winter months. Fall colors vary from year to year, depending on factors such as warm, sunny autumn days, cooler nights, late-summer rains, the absence of a hard freeze or major windstorms. In autumn, time becomes especially important. The crisp, near-freezing nights help make the colors “pop” into peak brilliance. Prolonged hard freezes, with temperatures below 28 degrees Fahrenheit, cause leaf cells to rupture, turning vibrant foliage brown and causing leaves to drop prematurely.



The changing of autumn colors happens primarily because of changes in daylight and the process of photosynthesis. Nature sends signals to plants and trees, telling them to stop gathering energy and prepare for dormancy, as I mentioned previously. As chlorophyll breaks down, the green color fades, revealing other pigments that create the brilliant colors of fall.

The “pop” in color comes from maples, which produce scarlet, deep red and burnt orange leaves. Flowering dogwood turns purplish red or deep burgundy. Black gum and sourwood produce deep crimson. Sweetgum displays a brilliant mix of bright red, purple and burgundy. Aspen and birch turn bright golden yellow. Tulip poplar and hickory leaves become golden bronze or yellow. Oaks are the procrastinators of the bunch, turning russet or deep wine brown and often holding their leaves as long as possible, even into winter. American beech leaves turn a soft tan, while elm leaves become brown or dull yellow as they wither.

Some traditions view the shedding of leaves as a symbol of release, a way of letting go and embracing renewal. As we watch fall unfold and the leaves drift from the trees, we can reflect on our own cycles and growth. I hope the beauty of fall leaves a warm place in your heart this year as you watch the colors unfold.

Christa's catch: How recreationists become environmentalists

By Christa Clasgens, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

It is not uncommon to find ourselves investing our time in a new hobby, only to watch it grow into something much more. In fact, it's a shared experience. Throughout my own journey of becoming involved in the outdoors, I've watched thousands of others go through the same transformation. We all start at square one, and many of us, if not most, go down our own rabbit holes, only to eventually arrive in the same new world together.

By this, I mean the pipeline that begins with an outdoor hobby or activity and often leads us toward becoming conservationists and environmentalists. But why does this happen? Is it possible to simply enjoy the hobby for what it is without allowing it to evolve into something deeper or change the way we see the world? The answer is yes, but I believe it's less common than we might think.

Before I began fly fishing, I was a traditional angler. Fishing for bass with a spinning reel was my go-to, and I enjoyed spending time on lakes and ponds. When I made the transition to fly fishing, however, everything began to shift.

The intricacies of fly fishing were more than I ever expected, and I couldn't help but immerse myself



in it. I pored through information online, listened to professionals, studied techniques and locations, and became fascinated by fly patterns. Before long, I found myself outside nearly every day, fishing or searching for new waters to explore with whatever small pieces of knowledge I had gathered.

Years of this led to proficiency, and proficiency led to new challenges.

At some point in the learning process, we experience what I like to call “the shift.” The water we had fished for years suddenly seems different. The behavior of the fish changes. Rivers and creeks no longer look the way they did five years ago, and we are forced to adjust.

More often than not, these changes leave us with questions. Why is the water different? Why are the fish behaving differently? What can I do to adapt to this new reality?

It's at this point in our angling journey that we begin turning to science, research and professionals for

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The South Fork Cherry fight (still) isn't over

By Andrew Young, Staff Attorney, Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA)

A little over a mile of road through the Monongahela National Forest could determine whether Rocky Run Mine reopens. In our previous litigation, South Fork Coal Company's own manager told a federal court that the mine would have to close without that crossing. Now Clearco Processing Corporation wants to use it for another ten years.

South Fork's bankruptcy left unreclaimed mines across the Cherry River watershed. Clearco and Aurevo Resources are trying to restart the operation, and we've been challenging the permit transfers and proposed use of the forest roads. I would much rather be writing about the cleanup. Instead, we're back to arguing with agencies that seem more interested in getting the trucks moving than dealing with the damage already done or complying with federal law.

In late September, ABRA submitted 50 pages of comments and more than 2,000 pages of exhibits on behalf of our partner organizations, opposing the Forest Service's proposed road permit. The exhibits bring together years of inspection reports, photographs, stream measurements and sworn statements. We're putting that evidence into the record now to support a formal objection and, if necessary, another federal lawsuit.

Our coalition remains strong: West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, ABRA, Appalachian Voices, the West Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity and Appalachian Mountain Advocates. Thank you to everyone



Recent flyover image of Rocky Run Mine and the current damage. (Photo by Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance)

who submitted comments. We know this takes time, and we appreciate your persistence.

Two roads, different risks:

Forest Road 249 would carry coal from Rocky Run to the preparation plant in Clearco. The proposal allows trucks weighing up to 125 tons fully loaded. The public, meanwhile, would lose access to that road and the adjacent national forest land for the entire ten-year permit term.

Forest Road 223, beside Bear Run, would likely not carry coal under this proposal. It would carry equipment, diesel, gasoline, hydraulic fluid, waste oil and explosives used in blasting. An industrial fuel or chemical spill could reach Bear Run and travel into the North Fork Cherry, Richwood's drinking-water source. The absence of coal trucks on FR223 does not make this a harmless use of a forest road.

Both forks contain critical habitat for the endangered candy darter, and the watershed supports native brook trout. Traffic and grading on either road can send more sediment into streams already struggling with it.

Clearco claims other routes could get coal out of Rocky Run.

We've asked for the evidence, especially given South Fork's sworn statement that it needed this crossing. The Forest Service has accepted Clearco's claim and left the mine's impacts out of its environmental review. Our position remains that Rocky Run cannot operate profitably without the forest crossing. The agency cannot simply assume otherwise and avoid examining the blasting, excavation and polluted runoff its permit would enable. Our comments explain why we believe the mine and its access roads must be reviewed together under federal environmental law, despite the Supreme Court's 2025 Seven County ruling on separate projects.

What the records show:

Longtime WVHC member Rick Webb analyzed the Forest Service's own streambed measurements and graphed the results. In all three Bear Run sampling years available to us—2011, 2016 and 2021—sediment smaller than one millimeter exceeded the level the Forest identifies as harmful to coldwater fisheries. Fine sediment fills the spaces in gravel where fish lay their eggs. The measurements don't tell us where the sediment came from, but they

make clear why adding more is a concern.

The Forest Service did not use those measurements in its environmental assessment. Yet it concluded that receiving streams could absorb additional sediment from the project. How does the agency reach that conclusion without accounting for the sediment its own staff already found?

Our exhibits also document damaged roads, failed sediment controls and coal spills under South Fork. The Forest's latest monitoring report shows improvements in water-quality safeguards, but nearly one in four evaluations across the forest still scored "poor." Another promise to maintain the roads is not enough. Who will inspect the controls, and how quickly will failures be fixed?

During the comment period, the Forest Service withheld its biological assessment and supporting aquatic analysis, calling them drafts while consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service continued. We requested those records and newer stream data. We should not have to chase down the science behind a proposal to use the public lands that we own.

This creates a real problem for anyone trying to participate. We are expected to raise our objections during the comment period, yet important information supporting the agency's conclusions is unavailable. We've asked for its release and time to review it before a decision. Public comment should mean more than guessing what is in documents the

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West Virginia Highlands Conservancy opposition to the Valley Link and MARL transmission lines in the Highlands

By West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Board

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy opposes construction of the Mid-Atlantic Resiliency Link and Valley North transmission lines through West Virginia and the greater Highlands region.

These enormous transmission projects would impose lasting costs on West Virginia's forests, waterways, communities, and electric customers. Much of the demand driving these proposed projects comes from the rapid expansion of data centers in Northern Virginia, yet West Virginians would bear a significant share of their physical, environmental and financial burdens.

WVHC calls upon the West Virginia Public Service Commission and other state and federal decision-makers to reject the projects and require full and transparent consideration of less damaging alternatives.

Basis for our opposition:

- **Data center growth and climate pollution:** The projects are being driven largely by rapidly growing electricity demand from Northern Virginia data centers. Expanding the capacity

to move power from a grid still heavily dependent on coal and natural gas could prolong fossil fuel use and increase climate and air pollution at a time when reducing emissions is paramount.

- **Permanent damage to the Highlands:** Towers reaching roughly 150 to 175 feet and 200 feet wide, continuously maintained corridors would permanently industrialize some of West Virginia's most scenic landscapes, forever degrading land and creating lasting visual impacts.
- **Forest fragmentation and water resources:** The projects would clear hundreds of miles of new rights of way through forests, farms, streams and wetlands. This would fragment wildlife habitat, disturb steep and erodible soils, and threaten streams that supply drinking water and support native aquatic life.
- **Unfair costs for West Virginia ratepayers:** West Virginians could be required to help pay for transmission infrastructure driven largely by out-of-state data center development. Any claimed regional benefits must be weighed against decades of increased ratepayer costs and permanent harm to our land and communities.
- **Noise and quality of life impacts:** Construction, maintenance, access roads and high-voltage transmission noise would bring lasting disruption to previously quiet rural communities.
- **Threatens homeowners and**

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The South Fork Cherry fight (still) isn't over

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government won't share.

DEP leaves out the ending:

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection's September response to our permit-transfer complaint was particularly frustrating. DEP claimed the federal shutdown order for Road 249 "should have been terminated" after South Fork received a favorable mining-rights decision in July 2025.

That leaves out what happened to the decision. We appealed and asked the Interior Board of Land Appeals to put it on hold. Federal rules delayed its effect while our timely stay request was pending. Before the Board ruled on that request, the Forest Service terminated the road-use permit on which the mining-rights decision depended.

The Board later confirmed that the decision had expired. It dismissed our appeal because the approval was no longer in effect, not because it upheld South Fork's rights. In the separate shutdown-order case, South Fork's challenge was dismissed and its temporary relief ended. The federal mining agency confirmed in July that the shutdown order remained in force.

DEP's response reads more like an argument for the company than an explanation of how the law will be enforced. The old approval is gone, and it never took effect. Disagreeing with the federal shutdown order does not lift it, and Clearco does not get to inherit rights that no longer exist. DEP once again ap-

pears to be working toward a predetermined outcome instead of focusing on complying with federal law.

Another chance to speak up:

Appalachian Mountain Advocates has also helped coalition members pursue enforcement, including June notices of intent to sue over unauthorized road use, pollution and reclamation failures. We're asking the Forest Service to deny the new permit and preparing to challenge an approval. The September comments and exhibits give us a substantial administrative record to work from for future fights.

We expect another public comment period in the months ahead, when the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement publishes notice of Clearco's application for a "valid existing rights" determination in the Federal Register. That review concerns the rights needed to use Road 249 (and, in our opinion, FR223) for surface coal mining operations, separate from the Forest Service's road use permit. We'll share the deadline and instructions when the notice appears and likely also send out an action alert.

Meanwhile, the reclamation for thousands of acres of zombie mines is overdue. Former miners and local contractors could be properly paid to repair drainage, stabilize slopes and restore streams. People around Richwood deserve that work and the cleaner water it could bring, without waiting through another company's attempt to make these mines pay. The agencies and companies involved should be enthusiastically working with us to reclaim and restore this remarkable area. But if that doesn't happen, we must drag them along and make it so there is no other viable option.

I saved a turtle today: Or did I?

By Valerie Staats, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy Member

It was on West Virginia State Road 26, between Bruceton Mills and Kingwood. A two-lane road, no shoulders, all curves and gentle hills, with drivers flying along as if it were a Formula One track. This section of the road runs beside the beautiful Cheat River. I saw the turtle near the double yellow line, stock-still and possibly dead, facing the road’s high side away from the river. I had to stop. In jeans and steel-toed boots, gray hair flying in the breeze, I picked my way along the edge of the road, perhaps half a football field away, to the turtle. Every time a car or pickup truck came racing along from either direction, I patted the air down with both my hands in what I hoped was a universal gesture for “slow down and look.” Every time, I held my breath and waited for the



The common snapping turtle (Chelydra serpentina) laying in a bed of grass.

smush. To my happy surprise, every traveler did slow down and guided their wheels around the turtle. I approached. It was big, about a foot long, dark brown with no noticeable markings, and had a spiky, curved tail sticking out about six inches, a face and four legs and feet as wrinkly as time itself. It was definitely alive, though still. I tried moving it along with my boot toe but got nothing doing. It reacted to

my gestures, but would not go. I grabbed a long, solid stick from the roadside and tried prodding the old gal or guy to get moving. Still nothing. I admit I was afraid to pick it up. I had no gloves. What if it bit me and wouldn’t let go? I’d heard stories. I knew that turtle jaws were incredibly strong. Was this a snapping turtle? I wanted to move it, but I was chicken. Cars kept coming. Finally, I gave up and left the turtle to

its fate, whatever that would be. Fate delivered. A sporty white car with a black roof zipped by. It stopped, but too far ahead to do anything. The driver took off again. I trudged on toward my car. Suddenly, I saw the little white car come roaring back from the other direction. I half-feared that the driver was going to chastise me, maybe disapproving of my being in the road or trying to interfere with drivers, or both. The driver hit the brakes right beside the turtle, jumped out, picked up the turtle with both bare hands, and carried it the rest of the way across the road. I clapped and shouted my thanks, and he gave me a quick wave. Then he jumped back into the car and took off, reappearing moments later heading back in his original direction, roaring on. Maybe that kind young man saved my life, too.

BECOME A WVHC MEMBER

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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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

Christa's catch: How recreationists become environmentalists

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answers. We adapt to our changing circumstances, and we learn.

We begin learning about the health of our waterways and how that health directly impacts the fish we pursue. We learn how shifts in climate can influence the outcome of our fishing days. And, perhaps most importantly, we begin to understand that many of the forces affecting our water and fish are the result of human activity.

Thankfully, that last realization is also what gives people like you and me a voice and a stake in what happens to our land and water. Our understanding of the forces we control as humans becomes another part of our growing knowledge as anglers. The rivers and creeks we frequent become more than places to fish; they become places we feel



Christa Clasgens teaching a women's fly fishing course in partnership with Friends of Deckers Creek. (Photo provided by Christa Clasgens)

compelled to defend. Our unconditional support for these waters grows as we watch state and industrial interests propose projects or practices that could degrade them. Protecting our waterways from harm is no longer something that happens somewhere beyond our reach. It becomes a personal priority.

The history behind our present-day fisheries can leave us dumb-

founded. Across our state, many of our waters are still recovering from decades of exploitation by the timber industry, oil and gas extraction, coal mining and countless other activities. The condition of our rivers today cannot be separated from the history of how we have used, and sometimes abused, them.

It becomes difficult to keep fishing at face value once you learn the history of the rivers you love.

Eventually, an emotional connection becomes intertwined with our knowledge. We no longer see these waterways simply as places where we spend our weekends. They become part of us. That emotional connection to the places we love may be the defining moment in this journey from recreation to stewardship.

If you find yourself getting into fly fishing, hiking, climbing, rafting, biking or any other outdoor pursuit, you can expect to become immersed in the joys of it. You will deepen your knowledge and experience, and somewhere along the way, you may discover a passion deep within you that you never knew existed.

Your love and admiration for what began as a hobby can eventually come full circle. You may find yourself taking a stand against anything that threatens to take that passion away or diminish the places and conditions that make it possible.

Everyone should find something they love doing outside.

And once you find that special activity that brings you joy, gives you purpose and makes you feel connected to something larger than yourself, don't hesitate to protect it for all it's worth.

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**

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy opposition to the Valley Link and MARL transmission lines in the Highlands

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landowners through eminent domain seizure: The proposed routes threaten homes, forests and family lands. If approved, project developers could seek easements through eminent domain when agreements with landowners cannot be reached.

Background:

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has a long history of staunch opposition to large scale projects that would degrade and destroy the environment and natural beauty of the Highlands. Those opposition efforts go as far back as the original opposition to Corridor H, the saving of Canaan Valley from the Davis Power Project, up to the current fights against a data center in Tucker County and the PATH (Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline) transmission line.

In the early 2000s, PATH was also presented as an urgently needed regional transmission project.



Transmission lines similar to those of the proposed MARL and Valley Link projects.

WVHC joined landowners, community organizations and the Sierra Club in questioning its need and challenging its environmental and economic costs. PJM later terminated PATH and removed it from its regional transmission plan after changing demand forecasts and updated analyses no longer supported it.

The 500kV Mid-Atlantic Reliability Link (MARL) will run a total of 105 miles, mostly through West Virginia, including Monongalia, Preston, Hampshire, Mineral and Jefferson Counties. The 765kV Valley Link transmission line will run 261 miles through 20 West Virginia Counties including Grant and Tucker Counties. Each will have a 200-foot wide right of way path

bulldozed through forests, farms and home sites. The towers will be anywhere from 150 to almost 200 feet high and spaced about ¼ mile apart.

The purpose of these new transmission lines is to provide energy from West Virginia's coal burning power plants to power hungry data centers in northern Virginia.

Bi-partisan opposition has arisen from across the state to oppose these transmission lines. These lines will provide no benefits to the citizens of West Virginia and permanently disfigure the environment and beauty of the state. Already at least 12 County Commissions have signed resolutions in opposition to the Valley Link project, including Tucker County. The West Virginia

Public Service Commission staff has recommended that the MARL project be paused or dismissed.

WVHC Commitments:

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy will:

- Oppose regulatory approval of Valley North and MARL as currently proposed;
- Participate in relevant state and federal regulatory proceedings when appropriate and consistent with WVHC's resources;
- Advocate for thorough environmental review and meaningful consideration of less damaging alternatives;
- Support landowners and communities seeking accurate information and a meaningful voice in the process;
- Work with local governments, conservation organizations and community groups along the proposed corridors;
- Oppose the use of eminent domain for projects whose need, public benefits and alternatives have not been adequately demonstrated.

Petition opposing Valley Link North and the Mid-Atlantic Resiliency Link



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.



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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