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Conservationists sue Aurevo Resources for numerous mining violations in the Cherry River watershed

By Appalachian Voices

Mining imperils pristine trout streams and endangered candy darter.

A coalition of conservation groups sued Aurevo Resources and its officers for more than 50 violations of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act dealing with failures to reclaim the seven surface mines in Greenbrier and Pocahontas County, West Virginia. Aurevo's mining complex releases pollutants including sediment and metals into the South Fork of the Cherry River.

The mines were formerly operated by South Fork Coal Company, which went bankrupt and idled its operations in 2025. In May, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection granted Aurevo "advanced approval" to take over the operations, making the company responsible for correcting the dozens of violations left over by South Fork Coal.



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

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, Appalachian Voices and the Sierra Club, represented by attorneys with Appalachian Mountain Advocates, brought the lawsuit.

Aurevo Resources Inc. and its sister company Clearco Processing, which assumed the remainder of South Fork Coal's former operations, are new companies incorporated late last year by James Woods Jr.

Woods pleaded guilty to federal fraud charges in 2021, admitting to having leased a dozer on behalf of

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Conservationists sue Aurevo Resources for numerous mining violations in the Cherry River watershed

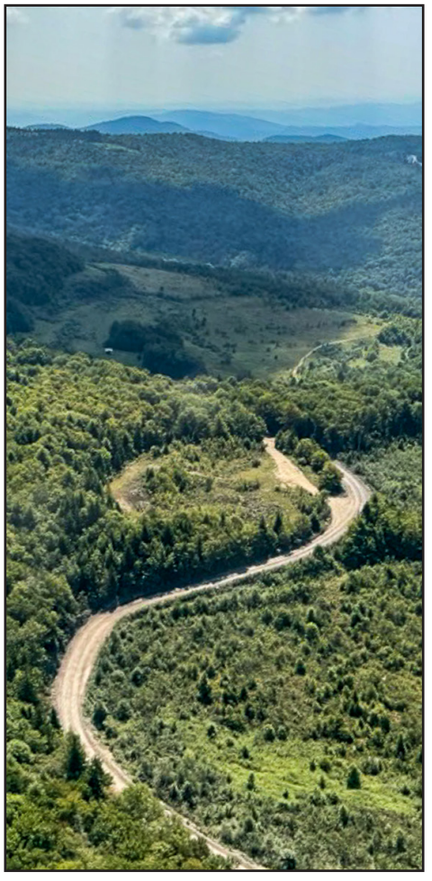
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a company he did not own and having it delivered to a job site. Aurevo and Clearco are owned by Bernard Brown, who is also listed as the entities' vice president in a federal regulatory database. No president or other officers are listed for the companies in that database, and regulatory files state they have no employees.

The Clearco/Aurevo mining complex covers about 3,600 acres in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Cherry River, including a haul road operation that illegally crosses the Monongahela National Forest and utilizes Forest Service Road 249.

"The South Fork of the Cherry River still has a chance to recover, and we want to see that happen," said Olivia Miller, Interim Executive Director of West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "A change in ownership doesn't change the responsibility to clean up these mines and protect the river. DEP needs to hold the new operator accountable, and we're bringing this lawsuit to make sure the work gets done. Our goal is a healthier watershed for the people and wildlife that depend on it."

"Rocky Run used to regularly produce 12-inch brook trout," said Micah Bates, an Appalachian Voices member from neighboring Fayette



Impacted haul road running alongside the Monongahela National Forest *(Photo by Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance)*

County who regularly fishes in the Cherry River watershed. "Since the mining started, it's changed entirely. The trout are smaller and fewer in number. The tributaries and the South Fork of Cherry are more frequently muddy. It's sad. Aurevo needs to do a lot better than South Fork Coal Company ever did if this watershed is going to recover."

Mining continues to have significant impacts to the environment in West Virginia, in particular our water and forests," said Bill Price, Chair of the West Virginia Chapter of Sierra Club. "One of our most valuable resources deserves protection instead of destruction."

We found our place in the work ahead: WVHC's 2026 Fall Review recap

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

More than 60 people gathered at Canaan Valley Resort State Park on Oct. 23–24 for the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's 2026 Fall Review, "Finding Our Place in the Work Ahead." With wonderful weather, well-attended outdoor activities and opportunities to connect, learn and build advocacy skills, the weekend brought together longtime conservationists and newer members of the WVHC community around a shared commitment to protecting West Virginia's mountains, waters and communities.

The weekend began Friday with opportunities to explore the Highlands and reconnect with fellow conservationists. Attendees enjoyed a hike in Dolly Sods led by the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards before gathering for an informal welcome party at Big Timber Brewing in Davis. The gathering offered a relaxed opportunity to meet new people, catch up with friends and begin the weekend together.

Saturday's beautiful weather made getting outside even more enjoyable. Participants had several opportunities to experience the natural places at the heart of the Conservancy's work, including a guided tour of the Abe's Run wetland and a strenuous four-mile hike through



Attendees at the Abe's Run Wetland Tour. *(Photo by Mike Jones)*

Canaan Valley State Park. Feedback from attendees reflected how much these outings were enjoyed, offering both a chance to learn and an opportunity to appreciate the landscapes we work to protect.

The weekend also provided an inside look at the challenges facing West Virginia and the work the Conservancy and its partners are doing to address them. Extractive Industries Committee Chair Andrew Young discussed the committee's work and the impacts of mining. Luanne McGovern shared an update on the fight over data center development in the Highlands and across the state, while Dave Johnston highlighted the work of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards.

Following the Wilderness Stewards presentation, participants watched the Conservancy's documentary about Helen McGinnis, whose leadership helped secure lasting protections for Dolly Sods and inspired generations of conservationists.

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We found our place in the work ahead: WVHC's 2026 Fall Review recap

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Eileen Flanagan conducting her advocacy training at the Fall Review. *(Photo by Jordan Howes)*

A central theme of this year's Fall Review was that there is no single way to create meaningful change. As communities across the Highlands confront threats ranging from data centers and transmission lines to fossil fuel development and environmental deregulation, the work ahead can feel daunting. But the weekend's keynote speaker, Eileen Flanagan, helped participants consider how different skills, approaches and perspectives can come together to build stronger movements.

Flanagan, a Quaker author, speaker, activist and nationally recognized nonviolence trainer, brought decades of experience in climate campaigns and movement building to the gathering. Her Saturday afternoon training, "The Four Roles of Social Change," invited participants to think about the different roles people take on in advocacy and how those roles can work together.

Rather than simply presenting the four roles, Flanagan asked participants to divide themselves according to where they saw themselves in the movement: rebels, helpers, organizers and advocates. The groups then considered their approaches to social change, followed by conversations and collaboration about how to organize effectively. Participants had an opportunity to recognize their own strengths while learning to appreciate the contributions of people who approach advocacy differently.

The exercise reinforced an important point: movements need more than one kind of person or strategy. Rebels challenge the status quo, helpers provide support, organizers bring people together and advocates work to influence systems and decision-makers. Each role contributes something important, and effective movements make room for all of them. The training was engaging and inclusive, with everyone finding a way to participate and contribute to the discussion.

Flanagan continued these themes in her Saturday evening keynote, drawing on her experiences as a campaign leader and movement trainer to explore how people can build connections, sustain movements and work together through difficult struggles. Her latest book, *Common Ground: How the Crisis of the Earth Is Saving Us from Our Illusion of Separation*, explores the connections between ecological challenges and our relationships with one another and the living world. Her message offered an encouraging perspective for those working to protect West Virginia's natural resources: meaningful change is possible when people recognize their shared interests and find ways to work together.

Saturday evening also brought the WVHC community together for a reception, silent auction, fundraising dinner and celebration of the Conservancy's work. The gathering provided another opportunity to strengthen relationships and support the organization's ongoing conservation efforts. Funds raised through the event help WVHC continue protecting West Virginia's mountains, waters and communities.

More than 60 attendees, beautiful weather, enjoyable outings and thoughtful conversations made this year's gathering a memorable weekend. But perhaps the most important takeaway was the reminder that everyone has a place in the work ahead.

After more than six decades of conservation work, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy knows that protecting the places we love takes many people contributing in many different ways. Whether challenging harmful development, supporting community efforts, organizing neighbors, sharing information or advocating for stronger protections, every role matters.

Thank you to everyone who attended, presented, led an outing, volunteered or helped make the 2026 Fall Review possible. We are grateful for this community and look forward to continuing the work together. **We hope to see you at next year's Fall Review on October 29-31, 2027, at Blackwater Falls State Park.**

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

Apparel

- WVHC Cotton Hat (Black): $22.50
- WVHC Hemp Hat (Black or Green): $25.00
- WVHC 100% Cotton T-Shirts (Kelly Green, Navy Blue, Black) Available in XS-XXL: $22.00
- Black 50th Anniversary T-Shirt with "Celebrating 50 years" logo. Available in Small, Medium, and XXL: $20.00
- 50+1 Celebration of Dolly Sods Wilderness T-Shirt (Sage Green, Salmon): $30
- Square Black Bandana: $5.00

Please include $6.25 shipping for Apparel items

Stickers

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

Books

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

To order by mail make checks payable to West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and send to P.O. Box 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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Remembering Bill McNeel: A lifetime of service to West Virginia

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy mourns the passing of William Price "Bill" McNeel, a longtime board member, founding member and steadfast friend of the organization. Bill passed away on October 29, 2026, at the age of 87. His life was deeply rooted in the mountains, history and communities of West Virginia, and his many years of service helped shape the Conservancy from its earliest days.

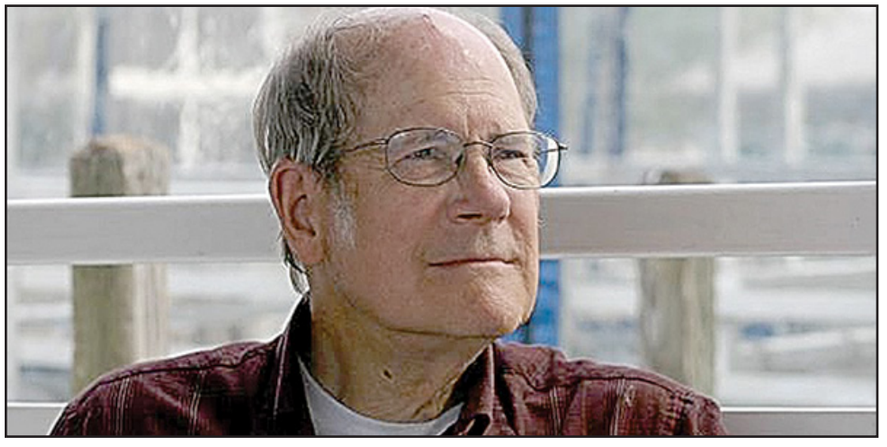


Photo of Bill McNeel. *(Photo obtained by The Pocahontas Times)*

It is difficult to say exactly when Bill first became involved with the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. As a 2018 article in The Highlands Voice observed, his service began "approximately forever ago." What is certain is that his presence was felt across decades of the Conservancy's work. He was among those who helped build the organization and remained a thoughtful and committed voice through generations of conservation challenges.

Bill's contributions reached across the breadth of the Conservancy's work. He advocated in Washington, D.C., for federal protection of the Cranberry Wilderness in the early 1980s, worked with the Shavers Fork Coalition in the 1990s and contributed to efforts involving the Greenbrier River and public lands. He also helped oppose unnecessary gas pipeline construction through the Greenbrier River. Whether addressing a major public lands issue or helping plan the Conservancy's 50th anniversary celebration, Bill brought a careful, informed perspective to the work.

Bill was not someone who sought the spotlight. His influence was often felt behind the scenes, through his thoughtful questions, steady involvement and willingness to share his knowledge. As Cindy Rank wrote in 2018, Bill was "part of the glue that has held the organization together all these years." That description remains an apt tribute. Organizations like ours depend not only on the people whose names appear in headlines, but also on those who quietly give their time, wisdom and commitment year after year.

Bill's deep roots in Pocahontas County gave him a special understanding of West Virginia's history, people and landscapes. A seventh-generation McNeel in the county, he carried a lifelong interest in the stories that shaped the region. He served as editor of The Pocahontas Times for 25 years, following a family tradition at the newspaper that stretched back to 1892. He was also a respected local historian, author and longtime champion of the Pocahontas County Historical Society. His research and writing preserved important stories about the region's railroads, timber industry, forests, communities and the Greenbrier River.

That knowledge was inseparable from his commitment to conservation. Bill understood that protecting West Virginia's mountains and rivers meant protecting more than scenery. It meant preserving the history, character and sense of place that make these communities special. He recognized the importance of wild places not only for those who enjoy them today, but also for the generations who will follow.

In a 1982 Washington Post story about the effort to protect the Cranberry Wilderness, Bill offered a reflection that captures the values behind his conservation work: "Wilderness is a necessity for modern man, to remind him that he's part of nature, and not above it." He explained that he was advocating for wilderness protection for his descendants. It was a simple statement, but one that expressed a lasting vision of responsibility to the future.

Bill's service extended well beyond the Highlands Conservancy. He helped establish and sustain numerous local and state organizations, including the Pocahontas County Historical Society, the Marlinton Railroad Depot and the Watoga State Park Foundation. He volunteered with the Marlinton Rescue Squad, served his church and school community, and contributed to the preservation of places that hold deep meaning for Pocahontas County.

In 2018, when Bill stepped away from the Conservancy's board, we expressed our hope that he and his wife, Denise, would stay in touch and continue sharing their wisdom with us. His influence, however, was never limited to a board seat or an official title. The knowledge, care and commitment he brought to the organization remain part of its foundation.

We are grateful for Bill's many years of service, for his quiet leadership and for the example he set. He loved West Virginia and understood the importance of caring for its mountains, rivers, forests and communities. His work reminds us that conservation is a long effort, built by people willing to show up, contribute what they know and keep working for the future.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to Denise, James, John and all of Bill's family and friends. We will remember Bill with gratitude and affection, and we will carry forward the work to which he gave so much of his life.

Off the beaten path: Fall, autumn and beautiful colors

By Cindy Berdine, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

There is a lot to be thankful for and celebrate in November. Let us start with Ecology Day. Ecology became a formal science in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The definition was simple: ecology is the study of the environment. The United Nations General Assembly designated November 1 as World Ecology Day. Ecology is the scientific study of how living organisms, like plants, animals and humans, interact with each other and their environment on every scale. The main mission is to celebrate ecology as a science and bring awareness to the role it plays in discovering solutions to improve our environment.

Ecology explains the planet's life support systems and directly impacts human survival and prosperity. It provides the basis for nature conservation and an understanding of the interdependence between people and nature. This knowledge is vital for food production, maintaining clean air and water, and sustaining biodiversity in a changing climate. Ecology helps identify how pollutants affect living organisms and ecosystems.

November 15 is America Recycles Day.

November 17 is National Take a Hike Day. This is so important because you need to be able to enjoy nature as well as protect and preserve it. Not to mention, hiking is good for your mental and physical health. It helps inspire you and build support for what you love.



(Photo donated by Kent Mason)

Don't forget that November brings migratory birds. Juncos start to arrive, and it is the start of winter bird feeding. Make sure your feeders are clean and filled with seed. I like black oil sunflower seeds myself. Then sit back and watch the birds reward your efforts and attention. Make sure you keep your feeders filled consistently. Seeds provide food for wildlifethroughout winter. Crossbills will eat conifer seeds, goldfinches and chickadees will eat seeds from milkweed pods, coneflowers, sunflowers and thistles. Acorns will feed squirrels, deer and blue jays.

What are you most thankful for in November?

Thoughts from our President

It seems that winter will be upon us shortly as I write this. The prediction is for two to six inches of snow here in Canaan Valley this weekend. I hope everyone is prepared, with snow tires on and boots ready for hiking in the snow!

We have some good news and some sad news. The sad news is that Helen McGinnis passed away on October 4, 2026. As most of you know, she was one of the first people to hike Dolly Sods in the 1970s. She helped map its trails and ultimately wrote the proposal to the U.S. Forest Service and Congress to designate Dolly Sods as a wilderness area. So whenever you hike up there, think of Helen and remember that we have her to thank for helping protect this beautiful place as wilderness. The film we made about Helen is available on YouTube if you haven't seen it, and we will be planning further celebrations of her life in the spring.

We have also lost Bill McNeel, a longtime board member who contributed to many of the Conservancy's efforts over the years. There is a tribute to him in this issue.

On a happier note, we had a wonderful Fall Review at Canaan Valley Resort State Park. There was fellowship, a sharing of knowledge and a great group of people. Eileen Flanagan led an advocacy training workshop and later delivered the keynote address, sharing her experiences with peaceful protest. After morning hikes, we enjoyed a lovely afternoon of presentations and updates on the Conservancy's efforts to prevent data center development, our ongoing legal work to protect the South Fork of the Cherry River, and the activities of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards and Backcountry Stewards.

At our annual meeting, we said goodbye to three longtime board members who are retiring. They include Jackie Burns, who organized many projects, including Fall Reviews; Hugh Rogers, a founding member of the Conservancy who has faithfully worked on Corridor H for at least 40 years; and Cindy Ellis, who has served as president and contributed to many of our efforts. We will miss all of them and hope they will stay in touch and continue working with us.

We welcome three new board members who will bring a variety of skills and plenty of energy to help us continue and expand our efforts to educate and protect the Highlands. Paula Kaufman, Jeanne Tinsman and Eddie Brzostek each have their own ideas about how they can contribute to the Conservancy, and we look forward to working with them.

As our efforts expand, we need your support and volunteers. We will continue to keep you informed as our work moves forward. If you have any questions, or would like to volunteer or donate, we are here to talk with you. You can visit our website (wvhighlands.org) or contact me at marilyn.shoenfeld@gmail.com.

See you on the mountain!

Marilyn Shoenfeld
President
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

Welcome to the board: WVHC welcomes three new members

By Jordan Howes, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is pleased to welcome three new members to its board of directors: Edward Brzostek, Jeanne Tinsman and Paula Koffman. Each brings a distinct background, professional experience and perspective to the Conservancy's work. Their combined expertise in forest ecology, wildlife and bird conservation, education, journalism and the arts will add valuable knowledge and new voices to the organization as it continues its work to protect West Virginia's mountains, forests, rivers and communities.

Edward "Eddie" Brzostek brings a scientific perspective grounded in research on forest ecosystems and the relationships between plants, soil microbes and climate change. A professor with a Ph.D., Brzostek studies biogeochemistry, ecosystem modeling, global change and plant-microbial interactions. His research explores how plants and soil microbes influence the movement and storage of carbon and nitrogen in terrestrial ecosystems, particularly temperate forests.

A central focus of his work is understanding how different tree species promote microbial activity and nutrient availability in soils, and how those relationships affect the amount of carbon forests can store. His lab combines field observations and experiments with ecosystem modeling to better understand how forests respond to environmental changes. Current research includes the effects of tree species on carbon and nutrient cycles, how temperate forests respond to drought and how experimental findings can improve ecosystem models.



WVHC's newest board members Eddie Brzostek, Jeanne Tinsman and Paula Koffman.

Brzostek's background offers the Conservancy valuable scientific insight into the ecological processes that shape forest health and resilience. As West Virginia's forests face changing environmental conditions, his research experience can help inform conversations about the importance of healthy, functioning forest ecosystems.

Jeanne Tinsman brings a lifetime of experience studying, observing and protecting birds and other wildlife. Her interest in birds began when she was just four years old, growing up in Pennsylvania, and eventually led her to earn a biology degree from Shippensburg State College, now Shippensburg University.

Her career has included banding birds for Louisiana State University, counting migrating raptors in Veracruz, Mexico, and working as a general biologist with the California Condor Recovery Program at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. She also volunteered at Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge, where she banded birds at a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) station, and helped establish another MAPS station at Mary's River in Nevada.

Tinsman also served for 10 years on the Nevada Bird Records Committee, writing and publishing reports in the journal Western Birds. Her career included work with several federal agencies, hummingbird banding at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area and, ultimately, work with Get Outdoors Nevada. She retired in February 2023.

Retirement has not ended her involvement with wildlife conservation. Tinsman continues to watch and photograph birds, butterflies and dragonflies and damselflies, and volunteers at national wildlife refuges. Her extensive field experience and firsthand knowledge of wildlife conservation bring an important perspective to the Conservancy's board.

Paula Koffman brings a combination of creativity, education and public-interest journalism to the board. Raised in Charleston, she now lives in Elkins, where she works as an art teacher in Randolph County public schools. A painter, poet, journalist and educator, Koffman has built a career around both creative expression and engagement with the issues affecting West Virginia.

She also writes a Wednesday column for The Charleston Gazette-Mail, where she advocates for the protection of West Virginia's air, water and land, as well as political reform. Through her writing, she brings environmental concerns and issues of public importance to readers across the state.

Koffman's experience as an educator and journalist offers the Conservancy a valuable connection to the ways people learn about, discuss and engage with environmental issues. Her work reflects the importance of communication and public advocacy in building support for the protection of West Virginia's natural resources.

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy's work depends on people with a wide range of knowledge, experience and perspectives. From understanding the science of forest ecosystems to studying wildlife in the field, communicating environmental concerns and educating the next generation, these contributions help strengthen the organization and its ability to meet the challenges ahead.

We are grateful that Eddie, Jeanne and Paula have agreed to serve on the board. Please join us in welcoming them to the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy!

Morrisey announces water filtration program for Southern West Virginia coalfields

By Henry Culvyhouse, West Virginia Watch

Gov. Patrick Morrisey announced Wednesday the state will be investing $3.2 million into home water filtration systems in Mingo and McDowell counties.

The initiative will cover 5,000 homes that rely on well-water or have no running water at all and consist of distributions of "countertop water purification systems," testing for bacteria and other hygiene measures.

The Morrisey administration will target $1.2 million of the federal Rural Health Transformation fund to 1,000 high priority households, which include homes with no running water, elevated amounts of bacteria in the water and homes with infants and seniors.

The remaining $2 million will go to 4,000 additional homes.

Morrisey said the initiative was born out of the listening tour he took in the coalfields in August and is just a step in solving the southern coalfield's water crisis. He said he doesn't want to see videos of dirty water coming out of faucets.

"Like you, I get tired of it. I see some of the videos," he told a crowd in Welch. "I don't want to see those videos anymore. I want to know that I can look you in the eye and say



Water sample showcasing the current state of drinking water in southern WV. *(Photo by Caitlyn Ware)*

10,000 people are going to benefit from what we're doing to address those very issues."

Residents in the southern coalfields have spent decades dealing with dirty and contaminated water. During the last legislative session, activists and lawmakers from the area pushed several funding packages for new water systems, but the Republican supermajority shot it down.

Rep. Riley Moore, R-W.Va., who doesn't even represent that part of the state, tried and failed to get more funding in the annual budget bill on the federal level.

The Rev. Caitlin Ware is an organizer with From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice, a group that has focused on advocating for clean water in the region. She said the announcement is a good step to immediately addressing the problem, but in her experience filters can be eaten up by water in the region within months of installation.

"I'm curious to see how much it will cost the state extra beyond what's announced, but it's a start," she said. "I can't complain."

Distribution is expected to begin in February 2027. The state will be coordinating with the McDowell County Commission on Aging, food banks, churches, and volunteer fire departments.

Energy efficiency programs in West Virginia: Opportunities of a lifetime

By Perry Bryant

Two very significant energy efficiency programs, established under the Biden administration, will be implemented by the West Virginia Office of Energy. West Virginia has received $88 million to fund these two programs. However, the benefits are so significant and the income eligibility requirements so generous that interested people should visit the Office of Energy's website to check eligibility, join the waitlist and follow application updates before these funds are exhausted.

The two programs, the Home Efficiency Appliance Rebates program (HEAR) and the Home Owner Managing Energy Savings program (HOMES), both provide rebates for adopting energy efficiency measures. HEAR helps pay for specific appliances and improvements, while HOMES bases rebates on the energy savins from whole home project. Unlike tax credits, these rebates generally reduce the amount consumers pay for approved projects directly. Participating contractors receive the rebate and deduct it from the household bill, so consumers do not have to wait until tax time to benefit. Any costs beyond the rebate remain the household's bill.

The fact that there are two programs funding different energy efficiency measures, with different income eligibility criteria, greatly complicates this initiative. But wading through the details is worth it for any West Virginia homeowner (or renter with the landlord's approval) who is considering installing energy efficiency measures. Potential savings are very significant.

Before buying equipment or starting work, applicants must receive program approval. Contractor installed projects must use a program-approved contractor. Under current rules, replacement equipment must use the same fuel type as it replaces.The Home Efficiency Appliance Rebates program (HEAR) provides rebates to homeowners who install specific energy efficiency measures. The total amount that a household can receive in rebates is capped at $14,000 for low-income homeowners and some apartment owners. These rebates include:

- Heating and cooling heat pump: $8,000 maximum rebate
- Electrical panel (service box): $4,000 maximum rebate
- Electric wiring: $2,500 maximum rebate
- Insulation, air sealing, and ventilation: $1,600 maximum rebate
- Heat pump water heater: $1,750 maximum rebate
- Electric stove, cooktop, range, oven or combination washer and dryer: $840 maximum rebate

Income eligibility for both energy efficiency programs is based on the Area Median Income (AMI) established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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What we leave our children in the Monongahela National Forest

By Robert B. Miller, West Virginia Watch

I want my ashes scattered at Bickle Knob.

That may seem an unusual place to begin discussing forest policy. But it explains why the Monongahela Forest matters to me.

I taught my sons at Bickle Knob in Elkins, West Virginia. Soon, my son will take my granddaughters there.

The trails, streams and panoramas have enriched and continue to enrich my family's life. Our family's story is one among many in "our home among the hills." Preserved public lands hold those connections across generations.

Families whose stories there have not yet begun deserve that chance too. That is moral geography.



Scenic views of the Monongahela National Forest. *(USDA Forest Service photo by Kelly Bridges)*

Existing regulatory protections for West Virginia's natural resources should remain in place. That is why I oppose the Trump administration's proposal to rescind the 2001 Roadless Rule. Mountain State Spotlight reports that more than 180,000 acres across West Virginia's national forests could lose the rule's protections against roadbuilding and logging. The Monongahela is among the forests affected.

Years ago, while completing postdoctoral training in the Chicago area, my oldest son announced that he wanted to go fishing. He was 3.

Having little experience, I bought books, sought expert advice and purchased equipment considerably more sophisticated than our fishing skills.

Eventually, his younger brother joined us. As we prepared for visits home to West Virginia, fishing became an opportunity to teach both boys how to walk safely in the woods and leave no trace.

One evening at an Illinois forest preserve, darkness was approaching. I asked how they would find their way back to the car.

"With our flashlights, Dad!" my oldest replied.

He helped his younger brother turn on his flashlight and took his hand. Neither knew that I had placed reflective markers along the trail. Their flashlight beams caught the markers, and the way back lit up.

I was right behind them.

At the car, I reminded them that other trails would not have our markers. I told them how proud I was that they had been careful and had cared for each other.

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	Individual	Family	Org.
Senior	$15		
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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

What we leave our children in the Monongahela National Forest

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I think of that evening as I watch my son now teach my granddaughters. Learning to walk in the woods means paying attention to where you place your feet and where the people you love are walking. It means enjoying a place while accepting responsibility for how you move through it.

Adults making decisions about our forests might consider that lesson.

I am not a forester. My training as a pediatric psychologist has taught me to examine evidence carefully. When the subject is a forest where my son is passing along our respect for the beauty of West Virginia to my granddaughters, I have a responsibility to do so.

The Roadless Rule generally restricts road construction and timber harvesting in inventoried roadless areas. It includes exceptions, including limited cutting of generally small trees to reduce uncharacteristic wildfire effects when specified ecological conditions are met.



Brecky's Creek running along the outer edge of the Monongahela National Forest in Huttonsville, WV. *(Photo by Jordan Howes)*

The administration argues that rescission would give local forest managers more flexibility to address wildfire and forest health. Forest Service research describes long intervals between fires across much of the Monongahela landscape, alongside areas with more frequent historical fire in its drier eastern areas near the Virginia border. That varied history calls for continued scientific judgment. It does not by itself justify removing roadless protections.

Our own history also warrants care. The 1930 fire at Dolly Sods offers a caution: logging debris and removal of forest cover contributed to a devastating fire that consumed deep organic soil layers, in places down to bedrock.

That does not prove that modern timber harvesting always increases fire risk. It challenges the assumption that more logging necessarily makes a forest safer. Rescission would not itself authorize logging. Future projects would still have to comply with forest plans and applicable law. Calling the change "flexibility" does not tell us whether it is wise.

Responsible forestry has a place in West Virginia. So does protecting places where quiet woods and the chance to pass them on are themselves public benefits.

West Virginia's history of extraction should make us especially vigilant against weakening existing protections for our natural resources.

Federal officials must demonstrate why existing exceptions within the Roadless Rule are insufficient. West Virginia's congressional delegation should defend existing protections for our natural resources, including this rule.

My granddaughters and other children will inherit the consequences. Perhaps they will have children of their own to take into these woods and say, "This is where my father brought me. This is where his father brought him."

And then take a small hand and gently and respectfully keep walking.

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**

Energy efficiency programs in West Virginia: Opportunities of a lifetime

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(HUD). Regretfully, HUD establishes the Area Median Income by county. As a result, there are 55 different income eligibility standards for West Virginia. Below are three counties and the approximate income eligibility limits for low- and moderate-income residents.

Low-income households are defined as those earning less than 80% of the AMI. Under HEAR, they can receive rebates covering up to 100% of eligible product costs, subject to the limits above. Moderate-income households qualify for rebates covering up to 50% of eligible product costs, also subject to the limits. For example, an eligible $12,000 heat pump project could receive a $6,000 rebate, below the $8,000 heat pump cap. Moderate income is defined as households earning between 80% and 150% of the Area Median Income. For an individual in Kanawha County, that means an annual income between $43,050 and $84,937. For a household of four, the annual income range is $61,450 to $121,200. Households with incomes above 150% of AMI do not qualify for any rebates under the HEAR program.

Homeowner Managing Energy Savings (HOMES)			
Household Income	AMI	Energy Savings	Benefits
Low-income	Less than 80%	Greater than 35%	100% of the cost of installation capped at $20,000
Low-income	Less than 80%	20% - 34%	100% of the cost of installation capped at $16,000
Above Low-income	Above 80%	Greater than 35%	50% of the cost of installation capped at $4,000
Above Low-income	Above 80%	20% - 34%	50% of the cost of installation capped at $2,000

Home Owner Managing Energy Savings (HOMES) is a whole-home approach to energy efficiency. A program-approved energy auditor performs an energy audit, an assessment of how a home uses energy, to determine what energy efficiency measures would reduce energy usage and by how much. Recommended improvements could include weatherization, adding insulation, upgrading a gas furnace or upgrading a heat pump.

If the audit finds that the energy efficiency measures will reduce a home's energy usage by 35% or more, and the homeowner qualifies as low-income, the HOMES program will provide rebates covering 100% of the cost of installing the energy efficiency measures, up to $20,000 per household. Low-income is defined as earning less than 80% of the AMI. If the measures identified in the energy audit produce energy savings of between 20% and 34% of the low-income homeowner's energy usage, the rebates will still cover 100% of the cost of installing the energy-saving measures, but they are capped at $16,000 per household.

There is no upper income limit for rebates in the HOMES program. If a homeowner earns more than 80% or more of the AMI, and the energy audit shows that the measures will reduce energy usage by 35% or more, the homeowner will qualify for rebates covering 50% of the cost of installing the energy efficiency measures, capped at $4,000 per homeowner. If the energy audit shows that the measures will reduce energy consumption by between 20% and 34%, the homeowner will qualify for rebates covering 50% of the cost of installing energy efficiency measures, capped at $2,000.

The income eligibility requirements for these two energy efficiency programs are so generous, and the benefits so significant, that funds for the programs may not last long. If you're interested in participating in either program, it's best to apply on the WV Office of Energy website as soon as possible.

When will these rebates be available?

Good question. The WV Office of Energy is accepting applications through its website's waitlist process. It's August 2026 guidance describes a limited HOMES pilot, with statewide availability to follow, and says HEAR applications are not yet open. Residents should check the website for the latest availability and launch updates. Exactly when these benefits will be awarded remains unclear.

West Virginians have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to save money on skyrocketing utility bills while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions from our homes and apartment buildings. The state has some of the highest rates of homeownership in the country. Yet our housing stock is among the least energy-efficient in the country. Perhaps no state in the country can benefit more from these two energy efficiency rebate programs than West Virginia.

Unfortunately, these two rebate programs are complex and confusing. We should all do what we can to educate our friends and neighbors about how they can take advantage of these programs. An opportunity like this is unlikely to come again any time soon.

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.



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