FREE

The Appalachian Voice

June / July 2019

Also Inside:

Pipeline Update • African-American Cultural Center • One Town’s Fight With Contamination

Paddle Appalachia

14 Summer Boating Trips for All Levels
Whitewater Women Making a Difference
Protecting the Nolichucky River

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Deadly Elk and Deer Disease Spreads

In December 2018, wildlife officials closed the 50-year-old Tennessee Red wolf reintroduction program. The state’s wolf population has been reduced to a small number of captive animals due to the spread of disease. The disease, caused by the spirochete Borrelia burgdorferi, is also known as Lyme disease. In Virginia, 14 cases of human Lyme disease have been reported in the past year. The disease is spread by ticks, which are commonly found in the state’s forests and woods. The red wolf population in Tennessee has been reduced to less than 200 individuals, and the state is working to prevent the disease from spreading further.

EPA Rejected Proposed Oak Ridge Landfill

A controversial proposed landfill at the Oak Ridge Reservation Superfund Site was rejected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in August 2018. The proposed landfill would have contained low-level radioactive waste from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, one of the nation’s largest nuclear research facilities. The EPA determined that the proposed landfill would not be a safe and secure facility for the storage of the waste, and recommended that the landfill not be approved.

First Destroys Office at Highlander Center, White Supremacy Sign Found

In late June 2019, an unkown person destroyed an office at the Highlander Center, a social justice training and research center in Milledgeville, Georgia. A white supremacist sign was found in the office, and police are investigating the incident.

Climate Coalition Draws to Attention Impacts on Streams

Southwest Virginia environmental organizations recently hosted a conference on climate change and its effects on local waterways. The conference focused on pressing concerns about negative impacts on streams and waterbodies from local and statewide climate change initiatives. According to Wally Smith, a biologist at the Appalachian Voices in Bristol, Virginia, the region’s waterways are being impacted by climate change and other factors, and there is a need to protect and preserve them.

EPA Proposes Restrictions on Oak Ridge Landfill

A controversial proposal to expand the Oak Ridge Reservation Superfund Site’s landfill was rejected by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in August 2018. The proposed expansion would have allowed for the landfilling of additional radioactive waste from Oak Ridge National Laboratory. The EPA determined that the proposed expansion would not be a safe and secure facility for the storage of the waste, and recommended that the expansion not be approved.

Second Ladies of Virginia

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Tribal Governments Dispute Proposed Casino

The Catawba, which operates two casinos in Western North Carolina, said in a statement that the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians is trying to enforce a state border on another tribe when, like us, they were here long before state borders existed.

The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs is reviewing the proposal for regulatory compliance. If approved, the application will go to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for a final decision.

Cleaner Air in North Carolina and Virginia

The Blue Ridge Mountains are beautiful, and thanks to a decrease in air pollution, the view of the mountains is a little bit clearer. and thanks to a decrease in air pollution, the view of the mountains is a little bit clearer.

Agency Says Hellbenders Not Endangered

The Eastern hellbender, a large salamander found across Appalachian, is one of eight species that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to protect under the Endangered Species Act in April. The agency stated that the hellbender, with the exception of the Cherokee subspecies in Missouri, is not endangered.
Meet the Marvelous World of Odonata

By Hannah McAlister

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Dragonflies and damselflies are named not for their beauty but for their ferocity. Both types of winged bugs are members of an order of carnivorous insects called Odonata, derived from the Greek term for teeth, which the insects have on their mandibles. In North America, there are nearly 500 species of Odonata and 241 of these species reside in the Southeast.

These two Odonata species have several physical differences. The eyes of dragonflies take up most of the head and wrap around the side, while damselfly eyes always have a space between them. Dragonfly bodies are bulkier, shorter and thicker than those of damselflies, and dragonflies’ hind wings are larger than their front set of wings. Dragonflies at rest also hold their wings out to the side, unlike damselflies, which hold their wings behind them.

When it comes to identifying Odonata species, there is a learning curve, says Tennessee State Parks-Biologist Emeritus Richard Connors. There are various markings on adults that aid in identification, including head size and coloring of markings on the wings and abdomen.

“For help identifying species, Connors suggests posting photographs to websites like the Southeastern Odes Facebook group or Odonata Central, the record-keeping site of the Dragonfly Society of the Americas. “There are people out there who are really into this, like myself, and would be happy to help people identify what they’re seeing,” he adds.

Odonates spend most of their lives in water during their larval or nymph stage. Unlike butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies do not have a resting stage during their metamorphosis. After the eggs are laid, they typically hatch in two to five weeks. The nymphs spend around a year in the water, using gills to breathe. Starting in April, odonates begin to emerge and crawl out of the water and shed their skin to become adult dragonflies and damselflies.

The adult stage only lasts for a few weeks in some species. During the short time that odonates are “on the wing,” as Connors says, they must mate and lay eggs. They mate in a unique wheel position, and cross-breeding between different species is prevented by species-specific body shapes. While she lays hundreds of eggs, the male will hold onto the female, both to protect her and to keep other males away.

Odonates play a valuable role in the food chain as both predator and prey. Adult and larval dragonflies out insects and help control the mosquito population. According to the Smithsonian Institution, an adult dragonfly eats up to 20 mosquitoes a day. Both damselflies and dragonflies have a spore-shaped, hinged jaw that can shoot out in an instant and catch their prey.

In wetlands without fish, dragonfly nymphs are the top predator. In turn, nymphs are essential prey for fish and amphibians, while adults are consumed by birds, bats, lizards and spiders. To avoid predators, adult dragonflies utilize camouflage and rapid maneuvers enhanced by their bullet-shaped body and flapping wings.

Beyond that, these species can indicate the biological health of their aquatic habitats. Dragonflies and damselflies have been heavily impacted by the loss and pollution of wetlands for human development.

“Some of the most common indicators of water quality are sediment, pathogens and nutrients,” says Larry Everett, environmental consultant for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. Typical sources of water contamination that damage odonate habitats include construction of stormwater habitat and water quality management can aid the continued survival of these species.
The coating also contains benzene and other chemicals. In a March 21 letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Virginia State Health commissioner and the director of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality expressed concern about the chemicals in the coating leaching into groundwater after the pipe’s prolonged exposure to sunlight.

The two agencies stated that they had received numerous complaints from residents, and informed FERC that they would like to investigate the coating’s effects. The companies said they were willing to answer questions as the agencies have not identified any new health risks.

On May 17, activists in Richmond, Va., marched against a pipeline-gas pipeline in Union Hill, Va. Photo by Parker Michels-Boyce

Loosening Regulations

President Donald Trump aims to clear the way for oil and gas pipeline projects. On April 10, he signed an executive order in Annapolis, Md., that makes it more difficult for states to use the Clean Water Act to halt pipelines—just this May, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s administration denied a permit for a 24-mile natural gas pipeline. The other would give Trump the authority to approve international pipelines, instead of the service of multiple projects in multiple countries. The current projects do not include Alaskan projects such as the Keystone XL pipeline.

“Today’s executive orders are just the start,” former Trump administration Energy Secretary Rick Perry declared. “I have given corporate polluters a free pass to pollute our water and our health.”

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is expected to release a draft Environmental Impact Statement for Mountain Valley Pipeline Southgate in southeast Virginia in July. A public comment period will follow.

The proposed project would run through the mountains of Nelson County, Va., and other species. A decision on the case is expected in 2020, Seeking Alpha reports.

Mountain Valley Pipeline Southgate

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is expected to release a final environmental study to design the Mountain Valley Pipeline Southgate in southeast Virginia in July. A public comment period will follow.

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Pipeline Legal Disputes Escalate

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The Appalachian African-American Cultural Center
Preserving community culture in Southwest Virginia
By Kevin Ridder

Surrounded by the same mountain vistas and with a backdrop of the shining mountain lines atop a hill in the Pennington Gap. While not obvious from at least the former one-room schoolhouse that now houses the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center, says Ron Carson. “We’re trying to heal the world, to get people together. It’s because, if you don’t reveal, you can’t heal.”

Federal judges, lawyers, doctors, teachers, religious leaders, and more have attended these workshops and more have attended these workshops. Sam Ed Dobbs, a retired lawyer who once was the Lee County attorney has participated in several.

“Every time we met, every time we did a workshop and every time of a group — kind of the idea was, ‘We’re all in this together,’” says Dobbs. “It’s like pulling an arrow. I recognize something else I’m doing or saying or thinking that needs to be challenged.”

Kobak, whose father was a coal miner in Eastern Kentucky, helped the school save the schoolhouse from the demolition before it became the cultural center. She states that the center has greatly increased her awareness of black history in the region.

“I’ve learned so much, just with my daughter going through school in the last 30-plus years,” says Kobak. “I think [the center] helps to bring the community together and has been recognized by Congress for its race has no history, it will have history if it has a place and talk about, once again, ‘How do we preserve the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center?’

Ron Carson, who was working for the NAACP in Richmond, Virginia, states that he had no further use for this building and they were going to tear it down to send [the land] off to auction. I just knew that it was special to me. “Every year when you would come home during the summer. It’s your tradition. Then Ron Carson says, “We decided from that point that we might have a mission.”

The Carsons would store all the grassroots organizing collective Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tenn., to figure out how to best use it. [Read about the recently restored building on page 3.]

“We were part of the SALT program, the Southern Leadership Training program,” says Jill Carson. “We’ve got every single form and sit with people from everywhere, and we found out that little known history, there wasn’t been written about African-American people in the Appalachian region.”

Ron and Jill Carson knew that they had to act quickly to preserve the history of an African-American community.”

“We knew that the Appalachian African-American community here was an aging community, and it is one that we had to preserve. We’re not going to ignore the presence of people of color in Pennington Gap and we all walked out to see for ourselves. “What we thought we’d do is try to pull some of those decisions together. We had long history of the schoolhouse was built in 1939 with $16,500.”

“My mother was in the first group because it was her grandmother, Rachel Scott, built this building in 1939. It was a one-room schoolhouse. The walls of the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center are lined with old photos, historical documents and more. Prominently displayed is a black-and-white photograph of Rachel Scott in a thick, black frame above various class photos of schoolhouse alumni. Ron Carson states that it’s common for locals to visit the center and spot a photo of their parents or grandparents on the wall.

“Pennington Gap has a special place in many people’s hearts,” he said. “It’s a community that’s very much a community. And it was small to begin with. . . .”

Ron Carson says that these people, “The fact that the center exists is a powerful symbol. It think it makes it impossible for the community to ignore the presence of people of color in this region. “We went to the church, and he pretty much led the integration, and said, ‘It’s time for you kids to go to the white school.’”

Ron Carson and his classmates would pass three large buildings that comprised the town’s white school. One of the structures, a prominent building with four white columns, has since been converted into a local bank on Pennington Gap’s main street.

“We were always wondering why the white kids had playground equipment,” says Ron Carson. “You really didn’t know any better. This is what we had.”

One of the last student groups to be taught in the schoolhouse “was like walking onto the lawn with sockball right out there on the lawn with the white kids had playground equipment,” says Ron Carson.

“By Kevin Ridder

“On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously declared that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. However, it took 11 years for Lee County, Va., to integrate — not uncommon for school systems in the South. It might have taken even longer for the schools to integrate without the proactive work of local doctor Eds Beaty, according to Ron Carson

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For 25 years, the building was the only school for African-Americans up to fifth grade until Lee County integrated in public schools in 1965. Ron Carson, who obtained the building and founded the school in 1986, was with his wife Jill, then two to the former schoolhouse.

“Pennington Gap, Ron moved to Boston, where he met his wife Jill. Ron Carson, now retired, began the long struggle to preserve the Appalachian African Health Services in Southwest Virginia and started hosting oral history programs for local schools in the early 1990s. Ron Carson, who was working for the NAACP in Richmond, Virginia, was one of the last student groups to be taught in the schoolhouse.

“Since 1986, the Carsons have hosted workshops and relics from the past. “We decided from that point that we might have a mission.”

“We often forget that the fire was an electrical fire, and not arson — but Ron Carson says that there was no other way that the fire could have been started, because the building was an electrical fire, and not arson — but Ron Carson says that there was no other way that the fire could have been started, because the building was...
Contending with Contamination in Minden, W.Va.

By Kevin Ridder

Annette Coffman has lived in the town of Minden, W.Va., for 44 years. Once a bustling coal town of 1,200, the population shrunk during the industry’s decline to just 251 people by the beginning of 2018. Before 2010 ended, another 15 current and former Minden residents — including Coffman’s father — died from cancer. Her mother passed away from cancer in 2007.

“Today, if I decided to leave Minden and next month I was diagnosed with cancer, if I were living outside of Minden, then my cancer would not be officially related to Minden,” she says. Earlier in 2019, her father was diagnosed with cancer, and the community has been disappointed because the state has not declared a Superfund site.

“Some residents say they like Coffman and others went up door-to-door to every Minden home in 2017, roughly 40 percent of the people surveyed stated they would move out of the town if they could be relocated. With Minden’s inclusion on the National Priorities List, Coffman says she has hope.

“I’m excited about it. I’m glad that we finally have a Superfund site,” she adds. “It’s really made it clear that this has all these people that, ‘Oh, this PCB is not a toxic waste dump. Photo courtesy of Headwaters Defense

“Fruit recalls when Shaffer was still operating in the town. He and other local environmental and health justice or- ganization Headwaters Defense, lives in Minden, says, “I don’t see how they can’t be related to Minden.”

“In the early 1980s, the late Dr. Hasan s, local physician, began link- ing into links between PCBs and cancer in Minden. He passed away from a heart attack in August 2017.

“The results from this study, which were published in Environmental Health Perspectives in 2019, found that people who lived near the site had higher levels of PCBs in their blood than those who lived farther away. The study also found that people who lived near the site were more likely to develop cancer than those who lived farther away.

“In our research, we found that people who lived near the site had higher levels of PCBs in their blood than those who lived farther away. The study also found that people who lived near the site were more likely to develop cancer than those who lived farther away.

“Shaffer’s company, Shaffer’s Mechanical Development, was responsible for cleaning up the site in 2002. The company used PCBs to clean the site, and the material was later buried at the site. The site was declared a Superfund site in 2019.

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To plan a trip on the Toccoa, search Georgia River Network.

**DIFFICULTY:** The Toccoa River’s primary paddling opportunities for beginning whitewater paddlers. — with one II+ rapid — and provides training for the river on the American Whitewater website or visit garivers.org/toccoa-river.

**FACTS:** The Toccoa is a Class I and II river running through the lower section. The state's waterways. The group's Rockcastle River is a program of the Mountain Watershed Association and the international Whitewater Watcher Alliance. Currently, the Riverkeeper program is implementing a comprehensive monitoring plan in the lower basin. Learn more at moreh2oey.com/toccoa-river.

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**More than a decade ago, Becky Overfield saw a river for a kayaking clinic on the Nolichucky River. She had just lost her mother, and the river had a long-term relationship and was feeling lost. In her first year of kayaking, she racked up 150 days on the water.**

**"The thing that hooked me was the release I felt when I was on the water. I didn’t have time to think about my problems. I could only think about myself, the water and how to get across it. I loved navigating through the water. Kayaking was like a game. There are few obstacles and rapids to avoid.**

**"The goal is to get people engaged in our waterways — we have so many waterways in Kentucky, and we want to get people engaged in those. The best way to keep tabs on them is to have volunteers on the waterways.**

**"Kayaking has never been about me — it’s about the river. You’re moving with the current, observing the environment, and understanding what’s happening in the river. Kayaking is a way to connect with nature, to see things from a different perspective.**

**"I think being in awe is a good place to be.”**

**To plan a trip on the Nolichucky, search for the river on the American Whitewater website or visit garivers.org/nolichucky-whitewater. — M.M.**
TULLICO RIVER
LOCATION: The Tullico River is approximately 80 miles from Knoxville and 60 miles from Dandridge. The river makes its way through Monroe County near Tullico Mills. In 1963, the river was dammed to form Lake Tullico. The lake presently provides several access points. All the rapids on the river are within view of the road, which makes it easier for future paddlers to watch and perhaps take which route they should take—or whether they should turn back, given the rapids ahead.

DIFFICULTY: Rapti is a very short river and can be navigated by most with a Class I designation. However, the lake can make it easier to navigate, so paddlers need to make sure they can read the lake.

TENNESSEE
LAURA DILLON

Photo by David Murrell

Laura Dillon began Whitewater kayaking in 2010 after moving to Chattanooga.

“My former life was as an academic. But when I grabbed that paddle, I was kind of left with a void, because horses were my job, my hobby, my holy social life.

She went on a white-water rafting trip with a coworker on the Ocoee River, and noticed how much fun the paddlers were having. The next weekend, she signed up for lessons.

“Anybody who is going to put in a pool first so they can get used to how the boat handles. It’s a way for you to be on the water, being upside down and getting out of the boat,” Dillon says with a laugh. “My first time out was a disaster. After that first time, her passion for kayaking was born and she hasn’t looked back since.

Paddlers do not know how to navigate such waterways of upstate South Carolina, also known as Johnny Appleseed, planted the first time ever in a boat was on a river.”

According to Zeltner, her recreation proposal for public review before April 2020. She went on a white-water rafting trip with a coworker on the Ocoee River, and noticed how much fun the paddlers were having. The next weekend, she signed up for lessons. She also recognized that learning paddling could be very therapeutic for veterans, as it could provide a sense of community and a way to express physical and spiritual freedoms.

“We’ve got the admiral’s, you’ve got the commander, you’ve got the head of state that you’ve got to look out for one another,” Dillon says. “And there’s a huge community here. When you’re in the paddling whitewater, if you’re in trouble, you need the people on the left and right of you. The rest of the world ceases to exist.”

Dillon now lives in Chattanooga, Tenn., where she volunteers with River Runner’s Chattanooga chapter as a Southeast coordinator. She is also still involved with the Atlanta and Fort Benning, Ga., chapters. — By Sam Eban

Paddling 101 Tips for fun and safe river adventures

A paddling trip is one of the best ways to get outside, but paddling does include some inherent risks. The danger is great depending on the type of water—on flat water, unexpected obstacles like drowned trees can put boaters in precarious situations. Proper knowledge and safety precautions will help to minimize these risks. Here are a few tips to get you started:

• Choose a quality life-saving device, also known as a PFD, when you are on the water. Many rowers say that the weight of a PFD isn’t their greatest concern. Instead, the jacket isn’t necessary for calm waters. Many PFD options exist, from inflatable ones to PFDs made of water-resistant material that won’t drag you down; on easier water to high float rescue vests for harder whitewater. Choose a PFD appropriate for your activity and weight, and don’t use it until you have received proper training.

• Take a swimming test course. These courses aren’t just for rescue professionals. Anyone who paddles on rivers needs to be comfortable in the water and be able to swim.

• Gather information about your paddling destination before you go. Determine whether a stretch of river is appropriate for you by considering the current, gradient, rapid classification, and weather. Remember that heavy rain and high flow can make any river or creek unsafe, and you don’t want to put yourself at risk if you plan to put on and take off the river or lake. Have an alternate plan for the flow of the river or lake and an alternate take-out plan in case your planned take-out leads to an accident, change in weather, or other unforeseen circumstance. Many whitewater outfitters also have local websites or guides with additional information.

• Understand the classification system for whitewater. While no substitute for detailed river information, the most rapid classifications can help provide a general idea of the difficulty. Class I is easy water with light riffles and often stream obstacles like bigons. On easier water, rescues are nearly always at hand. Class II rapids are moderate, with higher and more irregular waves, and should be scouted beforehand.
CLINCH RIVER
LOCATION: The Clinch River is located in southwest Virginia.

How to Access: The Virginia section of the Clinch hosts numerous launch and take-out sites. Review a map and trail-like information at clinchriverva.com.

DIFFICULTY: The river is mostly gently flowing and safe for beginners. However, the river is known for its Class II and III rapids, making it more challenging for intermediate and advanced paddlers.

VIRGINIA

EMILY SHANBLATT

Emily Shanblatt began whitewater kayaking on the New River in West Virginia when she was 10 years old. She has since become a certified kayak instructor and has helped countless individuals learn to paddle with confidence and joy.

In 2012, Shanblatt started the FBRA for Girls, an all-girls paddling program that focuses on leadership and personal growth. The program has become a huge success, and Shanblatt has been recognized for her contributions to the paddling community.

In her free time, Shanblatt enjoys spending time with her family and friends, exploring new places, and enjoying the outdoors. She is passionate about sharing her love for the outdoors with others and encourages everyone to get involved in paddling and other outdoor activities.

CYNTHIA AND EMILY GRIMES

Cynthia Grimes, who is the current president of the American Canoe Association, and her daughter Emily are both accomplished paddlers. They have both competed in numerous events and have won numerous awards.

Emily learned to paddle from her mother when she was very young and has been paddling ever since. She is now a certified kayak instructor and has helped many others learn to paddle with confidence and joy.

Together, Cynthia and Emily share their passion for paddling with others and work to promote the sport at all levels. They believe that paddling is a great way to connect with nature, learn new skills, and have fun with friends and family.

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The Clinch River is known for its Class II and III rapids, making it more challenging for intermediate and advanced paddlers. However, the river is also home to many species of wildlife, including bald eagles, ospreys, and river otters.

The river flows through several national forests and passes through several towns and cities, including Bristol, Virginia, and Kingsport, Tennessee.

In addition to its natural beauty, the Clinch River is also a popular destination for whitewater rafting. There are several outfitters in the area that offer guided trips on the river, and many enthusiasts enjoy the challenging rapids and beautiful scenery.

For more information about the Clinch River and its surrounding area, visit clinchriverva.com.

The Southeast is known for its many rivers and streams, including the Clinch River. These waterways provide excellent opportunities for paddling, fishing, and other outdoor activities.

The Clinch River is a widely acclaimed river, known as Goshen Pass, are only two miles east of the river.

The river is named after Matthew Fontaine Maury, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute who fell in love with the area during the Civil War. The river was named after Matthew Fontaine Maury, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute who fell in love with the area during the Civil War. The river was named after Matthew Fontaine Maury, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute who fell in love with the area during the Civil War.

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Keeping the Nolichucky "Wild and Scenic"

By Lorrie Goff

The Nolichucky River spans 155 miles in two states, winds through forested mountains in HUNTSVILLE, N.C., to Douglas Lake in Tennessee. The name derives from the Cherokee word Na-lish-oy, meaning Syrup-Sweet Flow, according to Western Carolina University professor Brett Riggs in the docuseries "Tributary Tales." A grassroots effort to secure a Wild and Scenic designation for the river for an approximately seven-mile section of the Nolichucky River kicked off in 2017 with an online petition created by Curtis England, a guide for Nantahala Outdoor Center.

The Wild and Scenic, established by Congress in 1968, states that rivers having "remarkable scientific, educational, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, scenic, archaeological, cultural, historic, or other similar values" shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. "Less than one quarter of of 1 percent of United States environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." -- Congress

Although Lenoir states that the U.S. Forest Service has generally managed the river well since its inception in 1994, those management practices appear to have been the problem and not the solution.

Several water quality concerns exist downstream of the Wild and Scenic section of the river. Section of the Nolichucky River has been listed as impaired over the years due to reductions in water quality. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency wasn't able to preserve the river in that manner." -- Congress

Congressional opposition. The only obstacle, he says, is that of the millions of acres damaged by coal mining, "the RECLAIM Act is an opportunity to accelerate spending of that $1 billion, distributed it to states and tribes over a five-year period," said Colburn. "The bill would also give a much-needed boost to cleanup efforts at impacted landfills — addressing dangerous open mines and contaminated mine drainage, unstable slopes and other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused other pervasive problems that have threatened communities and caused 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The Tennessee Valley Authority, the federally owned utility that serves most of the state and parts of six others, is facing a litany of lawsuits and problems. On May 3, three East Tennessee municipalities filed a lawsuit against TVA and its contractors over TVA’s alleged failure to clean up and remediate pollutants. Several states across the nation have begun battling TVA over coal ash in the 7.3 million tons of coal ash spill in 2018.

Roane County and the cities of Kingston, Tennessee; Maryville, Tennessee; and Jacobsville, Tennessee, filed the lawsuit against the TVA. In the lawsuit, the city of Maryville accuses TVA of failing to fully excavate millions of tons of coal ash. In addition, the city alleges that TVA is not only responsible for the cleanup of the coal ash, but also for the cleanup of the surrounding area. The city alleges that TVA is not taking the necessary steps to prevent future leaks and that the utility is not taking enough care in handling the coal ash.

The lawsuit seeks damages from TVA for the cost of cleaning up the coal ash and the surrounding area. The city also seeks damages for the cost of providing temporary housing and medical care to residents affected by the coal ash spill. The city also seeks an injunction against TVA to prevent the utility from discharging coal ash or other hazardous materials into the environment.

The lawsuit is just one of several that have been filed against TVA over the coal ash spill. In addition to the lawsuit filed by the city of Maryville, the city of Knoxville has also filed a lawsuit against TVA. The city of Knoxville alleges that TVA is responsible for the coal ash spill and that the utility is not taking the necessary steps to prevent future leaks.

The lawsuit filed by the city of Maryville is just the latest in a string of lawsuits that have been filed against TVA over the coal ash spill. In addition to the lawsuits filed by the city of Maryville and the city of Knoxville, several other municipalities and individuals have filed lawsuits against TVA over the coal ash spill.

The lawsuits are just the beginning of a long battle between TVA and the affected communities. The battle is expected to be long and costly, and it is not clear what the ultimate outcome will be.
By Kevin Ridder

A North Carolina bill backed by Duke Energy would allow the monopoly utility to raise rates with reduced transparency, according to the Energy Justice NC Coalition. The bill is expected to be released in June, and five senators and six house representatives — all Republican state senators and five minority leaders — are key to proposing the legislation.

Justice Coal Companies and Federal Agencies Enter Legal Battles

Attorneys for West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice’s son’s law firm, which has been sued by several coal companies, including the United States, have filed a brief on behalf of the governor and the state. The Justice companies charge that the EPA entered into a settlement agreement regarding three fees and related matters.

Two weeks before, the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration sued 33 Justice-family coal companies for the锴 in $4.7 million in unpaid penalties for mining safety violations.

As alleged in the complaint, the defendants allegedly violated over 2,000 safety violations over a five-year period and have, to date, refused to pay the fees. The complaint alleges that the defendants are “deliberately seeking to avoid the payment of the resulting fine, and to thereby avoid liability,” in a press statement.

“It is in the public interest that we have also issued subpoenas for the governor’s tax records from six state agencies,” Moncefah released in May. — By Anthony Morey

Virginia Budget Excludes Participation in Carbon Cap and Trade Program

On May 2, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam signed a state budget that includes the state’s ability to take part in a carbon “cap and trade” program. The budget includes the Commonwealth Air Resources Board will vote in April to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. The state will then have 15 years to implement the program.

The budget also includes the “provisions of reducing and out-of-state” in a new bill that would have blocked the state from entering a cap-and-trade program. The bill was introduced earlier this year.

Miners Pressure Congress for Pension Fix

In May, dozens of retired coal miners came to Washington and called on Congress to pass legislation to fix the pensions of retired coal miners. The legislation would allow coal beneficiaries of the 1974 U.S. Bankruptcy Act to sue for compensation.

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New Coalition Aims to Reform Energy Policy in Virginia

On May 7, Appalachian Voices and eight other organizations representing a wide range of public policy ideologies issued a joint letter to the Virginia Energy Reform Coalition. The unprecedented coalition is united to reform Virginia’s energy sector in a way that currently benefits utility companies at the expense of ratepayers and the environment.

“The status quo is carefully designed to line the pockets of the government-protected utility monopolies who have been calling the shots,” said Tom Cormons, Executive Director of Appalachian Voices. “Now citizens are demanding a system that puts consumers and other communities first by allowing small, clean energy businesses to compete in the marketplace on a level playing field. VERC’s policy goals are intended to lower prices and increase choices for ratepayers while improving the environment. These reforms include eliminating a well-designed competitive framework to incentivize the electricity bills for our local government, and they can make an informed decision about the public.”

To learn more about the coalition, visit appvoices.org, and read our letter from Tom Cormons on page 2.

Solar Discovery in Southwest Virginia

The U.S. Department of Energy Solar Technologies Office recently awarded Appalachian Voices the Southwest Virginia Solar Discovery Grant. Appalachian Voices is collaborating on the “Solar Discovery: Bringing Solar to New Markets” category. The project is to develop a tool that is proof and straightforward to help solar developers find new markets and present solar projects to policy makers in the area. Appalachian Voices is also working with the state to develop a solar discovery website for the region.

Energy Justice: New Coalition Aims to Reform Energy Policy in Virginia

As a part of the new coalition, Appalachia Voices is working to design a label for the new “Power Pilsner,” which would be a hop-infused pilsner to honor Appalachian Voices and would almost always belong to a sustainably-minded brewing company, a farm-to-fork, sustainable or organic restaurant, or a solar company. The new label would be available to anyone who chooses to purchase a new solar system in southwest Virginia.

Progress on Coal Ash in North Carolina

On April 1, we celebrated the welcome news that the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality ordered Duke Energy to evacuate the site of the coal-handling state that did not already have cleanup plans in place. The decision was a testament to the power of communication and the people living near these toxic sites who have lobbies to do in regards to Duke and any other corporation in the state.

Appalachian Voices is proud to have been a leader in this year-long fight—a joint letter with Appalachian Voices to A.C.T. Against Coal Ash. But the work continues—and Duke is appeauled and is trying to find the costs of cleanup on ratepayers. Read more on page 8.

In addition to Appalachian Voices, the following organizations are part of the new coalition:


Lynn Taylor. “This is what’s best for Virginia’s electricity consumer and this is exactly what the Virginia Energy Reform Coalition believes.”

In addition to Appalachian Voices, members of the coalition include Clean Virginia. Earle Beck, Chair of Alliances for Victory, Environmental Protection, Piedmont Environmental Council, Virginia Poverty Law Center. The next day, crowds gathered in Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring’s hometown of Leesburg, Va., to urge him to halt work on the Mountain Valley Pipeline while his office pursues a lawsuit against the company. They also called on Herring to affirm a state board’s authority to receive a Clean Water Act certification for the MVP. The board continued investigating the certification but stopped in March, citing vague recommendations from Herring’s office. More on page 8, Top photo by Dal Gus, right photos by Parker Michaels-Bryce.

On May 17, Appalachian Voices joined around 300 activists who stood up for environmental justice and marched through Richmond, Virginia, on the one-year anniversary of Governor Ralph Northam’s Executive Order 163, which required state agencies to conduct a thorough review of coal-ash plants and consider revoking the certification but stopped in March, citing vague recommendations from Herring’s office. More on page 8, Top photo by Dal Gus, right photos by Parker Michaels-Bryce.
This guitar at the Appalachian African-American Cultural Center in Pennington Gap, Va., belonged to the late Dickenson County, Va., musician and coal miner Earl Gilmore, a devout Christian who came out as gay towards the end of his life. He led his church choir, performed with renowned musicians and traveled internationally until his death in 2000. Learn about an upcoming documentary on Gilmore at BecauseImHere.com and read about the cultural center on page 10. Photo by Kevin Ridder