The Lure of Appalachian Trout

Betting the Farm on Hemp

Electric Costs on the Rise

The Impacts of Coal Bankruptcies

Also Inside: Get Started Gardening | A Just Transition for Coal Communities | The Elusive Bobcat
Draft Plan for Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Released

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For details on how to comment, see page 22.

Across Appalachia

Oak Ridge Funding is Secure; Waste Cleanup Remains Uncertain

In Oak Ridge, Tenn., a dispute between the U.S. Department of Energy, the Tennessee Water Quality Board, and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation is ongoing over hazardous waste site cleanup. The Oak Ridge Reservation Superfund site.

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State Environmental Agencies See Cuts to Funding, Staffing

From 2008 to 2018, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) saw a dramatic decline in both funding and staffing — both have fallen by 16 percent. Now, as cuts continue, the Trump administration is shifting environmental protection responsibility into states’ hands, despite widespread reductions to states’ environmental agency staffing and funding.

A recent report from the Environmental Integrity Project, a D.C.-based environmental advocacy nonprofit, evaluates states’ capacities to effectively regulate environmental permitting and enforcement. Despite states increasing revenue by tapping U.S. and oil and gas industries, states experiencing an “unprecedented boom,” the organization found that both 2018 and 2019 saw reduced funding for environmental agencies. Of these, 16 states made cuts greater than 20 percent, and 40 states reduced their environmental agency workforce.

Proponents for the cuts have argued that streamlining state agencies would cut costs and encourage efficiency and cooperation with the EPA. However, the large influx of incoming permits alone cannot be adequately considered by state agencies, according to the authors, suggesting these trends will threaten public health and the integrity of natural resources. The authors warn that these agency workers are the “thin green line that protects our families and environment” from pollution. If we cut that line, we will leave a contaminated landscape that we will not want to pass on to future generations.

For more information, visit tinyurl.com/EIPThinGreenLine. — Alyssa Elms Allen

Forest Service Pulls West Virginia Logging Project

In mid-September, the U.S. Forest Service announced plans to withdraw from a proposed timber project in West Virginia's Monongahela National Forest. The Big Rock Project, as it was known, called for logging on 2,400 acres of woodlands for timber harvest, road maintenance and general forest upkeep.

The agency stated the project was needed to improve habitat for grouse, deer, turkey and other animal species, as well as to foster conditions for sustainable timber production. But environmental groups including West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, the Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of Blackwater, submitted formal objections in July 2019, citing concerns about negative impacts on water quality and aquatic species.

Water Contamination in Paden City, W.Va.

The water supply of Paden City, W.Va., is contaminated with tetrachloroethylene, known as PCE. It is a chemical typically used as part of the dry cleaning process. The city first announced the problem to residents in March 2019, when levels of the chemical were at 5.5 parts per billion. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s maximum contaminant limit is 5 parts per billion.

According to WVDNR, PCE contamination reached 13.5 parts per billion in early February. Residents of the 2,400-population city have formed a Facebook page to raise awareness and petition the government to take action. Clean water activist Hannah Spencer started a GoFundMe to raise money for drinking water. “Everybody is exposed to this chemical in this town because it vaporizes at room temperature,” Spencer told WVDNR. “If you take a shower, you’re still exposed to this chemical.”

The local government is working with state and federal agencies toward a solution to this crisis. The city now has a Facebook page to raise awareness and connect with state and federal agencies toward a solution to this crisis.

The Virginia Wilderness Additions Act passed through the Senate unanimously on January 8. The act aims to increase the expanse of Rough Mountain Wilderness and Rich Hole Wilderness in Bath County by 3,600 acres. These two wilderness areas fall within George Washington National Forest.

Wilderness designation is the highest form of protection afforded to federal lands. The bill was originally sponsored by Virginia Senator Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, and is now in the hands of the House of Representatives. The House bill aims to increase the expanse of Rough Mountain Wilderness and Rich Hole Wilderness in Bath County by 3,600 acres.

The Senate Bill Would Expand Virginia Wilderness

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Tennessee Extends Mercury Advisory

On Jan. 8, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation extended an existing precarious fish consumption advisory on the Nolichucky River from Deep Lake to the North Carolina line. The extended advisory pertains to mercury levels in certain fish species and smallmouth bass. Sensi-
Hiking the Highlands
Pristine Waters At Bottom Creek Gorge

By Tina Badger

Tucked away in Montgomery County, Va., is a wonderful natural treasure called Bottom Creek Gorge Preserve. In addition to hiking trails, this place is home to the globally rare chestnut lip fern, old growth hemlock forest and Bent Mountain Falls, the second highest waterfall in the state. The falls empty into Bottom Creek, a Tier III waterway.

The Johnston Trail with my eight-year-old grandson, who greatly enjoyed it. The three separate paths. The trails can be completed as an out-and-back hike or a combination of loops. I previously hiked Bottom Creek, which was my vehicle thermometer registered about a 10-degree difference. About half a mile in on the entrance road, the Knight Trail, blazed in yellow, appears on the left. A short way down this trail, you will see a small pond on your right. I had the entire place to myself and found it very serene. Shortly after passing the pond, you will hear the sound of “the kettles” before you see them. The kettles are a series of broad, braided waterfalls formed as Bottom Creek makes its way into the gorge. Just over halfway down the Knight Trail, a short spur leads to Bottom Creek and the kettles. Be sure to pause and enjoy the beauty of this spot! There are ample flat spaces to sit, have lunch and enjoy the pristine nature.

Bottom Creek is a habitat for four rare aquatic species — the orangefin madtom, the bigeye jumpfish, the reseweder darter and the Roanoke darter. Ten percent of all fish species found in Virginia can be found in these waters. I spent a good hour listening to the sounds and taking in the scenery. The Knight Trail continues up past the falls and eventually intersects with the red-blazed Johnston Trail. Turning back, I stopped and hiked a short distance down the Johnston Trail, which is rather plain and unassuming until you reach the entrance road and head back out. The hike here really gives one an appreciation for the natural beauty of this unique area. Given the status of Bottom Creek, it’s easy to see why so many would want to protect it and other natural resources from the potential damage caused by the construction of a 42-inch fracked-gas pipeline.

While the Mountain Valley Pipeline may not cross this preserve directly, MVP has repeatedly allowed excess sedimentation in nearby waterways, such as the Roanoke River and Little Teel Creek. Instead, the water and lands surrounding areas such as the preserve should be cherished and protected for future generations to enjoy.

By Frank Robertson

Water rushes along Bottom Creek, above, in Montgomery County. Keep in mind that during dry weather, the falls may not have much water. Both times I have hiked, the falls were spectacular. The overlook is a great spot to sit and enjoy the expansive gorge and appreciate the geology and topography of the area.

To complete my hike, I returned back up the Johnston Trail a short distance and turned left on the blue-blazed Duval Trail, which is rather plain and unassuming. I could almost imagine being in the woods. Temperatures here run a few degrees cooler than the Roanoke Valley, so bring layers.

When I hiked, my vehicle thermometer registered about a 10-degree difference. The preserve presently has about 5 miles of hiking trails divided into these separate paths. The trails can be completed as an out-and-back hike or a combination of loops. I previously hiked the Johnston Trail with my eight-year-old grandson, who greatly enjoyed it. The hikes are not too strenuous and are suitable for families. This time, I chose to hike the Knight Trail, take a side excursion on a spur of the Johnston Trail to the falls overlook and complete my hike out on the Duval Trail. An entrance road leads to all these trails.

Appalachian Trail Days

Spring 2020

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN

WONDERS NEVER CEASE

Hand in hand is a wonderful way to share the awe and delights that await you at Grandfather Mountain. Share the joy today and help us preserve it for tomorrow.

www.grandfather.com
By Kevin Ridder

The Appalachian region’s mountains and valleys are the site of ongoing battles over the future of the region’s energy resources. One of these battles involves the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a project that would carry natural gas from West Virginia to North Carolina. The proposed pipeline would traverse some of the most scenic landscapes in the eastern United States, impacting both communities and the environment.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline was first proposed in 2014 by Dominion Energy and Duke Energy, two of the largest energy companies in the country. The pipeline was designed to transport natural gas from the Marcellus Shale, a source of abundant natural gas in West Virginia, to the eastern United States, where it would be used for power generation.

Despite the project’s economic benefits, many residents and environmental groups have expressed concerns about its potential impacts. They argue that the pipeline would harm the region’s natural and cultural resources, as well as the health and well-being of local communities.

In February 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce issued a final ruling on the permit for the pipeline, clearing the way for construction to begin. However, the decision has been met with significant opposition, and legal challenges are likely to follow.

The proposed pipeline would stretch 600 miles across Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, impacting more than 100 communities along its route. The pipeline would cut through mountains, cross rivers, and travel through some of the most sensitive ecosystems in the region.

Local residents and environmental groups have expressed concerns about the pipeline’s impact on the region’s water quality, air quality, and wildlife. They argue that the pipeline would harm the region’s natural resources, as well as the health and well-being of local communities.

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The Lure of Appalachian Trout

A bass fisherman explores the conservation and sport behind trout fishing

By Austin Combs

Anglers are native, for thrill-seeking and sport behind trout fishing. For me, that connection is found on the water. Not in the adrenaline-inducing, rapid, nor in tubes floating down flat waters. Like many others, my fasci- nation with the water is thanks to its fantastic fishing opportunities.

To learn more about trout fishing in Appalachia, I reached out to Daniel Williams, a fly fishing guide at Clidge Fly Fishing in St. Va. We sat down together at the local brewery to discuss what makes trout fishing exciting. For him, there isn’t a simple explanation.

“It is a lot of things,” Williams says. “It’s the feeling of success that comes with the complex behaviors of animals and the inner workings of the environment. And, on a very small level, puzzling out what is going around you. Trout fishing can be a brief interaction with a wild animal and leveraging your own knowledge and experience. He explains that though there are large, hard-fish- ing fish that are drawn for some, anglers often find themselves in the most populous regions in Appalachia. The fish are found primarily in the cold, clear waters of the region, not all of these species. For anglers like Williams and his clients, they provide additional fishing opportunities.

“If there was a trout to fish, it would be the brown trout,” Williams says. “From between 2 and 15 inches, they are growing up in a trans- formation that they become gradually. They get bigger and stronger, and they are more critical role in limiting our cold-water resources,” he says. “There are a ton of people in Appalachian trout. It is preserving trout fisheries by not just catching. To get a feeling on conservation efforts in Appalachia, I met with Stephen Owens, a biologist at Virginia Tech’s Depart- ment of Game and Inland Fisheries. We talk about what makes trout fishing exciting. For me, that connection is found on the water. Not in the adrenaline-inducing, rapid, nor in tubes floating down flat waters. Like many others, my fasci- nation with the water is thanks to its fantastic fishing opportunities.

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Energy Progress is also requesting their and operating costs, plus a guaranteed major utilities proposed rate increases. These prices cover capital investments owned utilities like Duke can charge customers since 2000. In 2018 alone, 78 of requests to state regulatory boards to reduce the rate increase in the fall. The group was that it would not deproportionately impact low- and fixed-income residents and those who attempt to save money through energy efficiency or renewable energy, especially because the proposal included an increase in the residential fixed charge from $6.76 to $16.13 per month.

Appalachian Voices formally inter- rested in the public utility commission, reduce the rate increase in fall 2019. The and 28.2 percent of residents percent and 28.2 percent of residents percent of its operations with fossil fuels. This comes after a 2019 effort by Appalachian Economic Reform Act. The bill would limit monopoly artificial high point for three years, re

The utility's latest rate request is. They have their top-exec- stocks and tickers hundreds of dollars. plus, we, their customers, are paying for Duke's 'success' in keeping the stock price up,” said Breckenridge. "It's not our call to shop around for a better company."

Southwest VA Rate Spike

In July 2019, Old Dominion Power proposed a rate spike in Southwest Virginia communities by $272 million, which represented a 15.6 percent average increase for residential ratepayers. This is one of the highest rate spikes proposed and implemented in 2019, and it was the second-highest proposed rate increase for a single ratepayer. Duke is the only ratepayer that has a significant amount of its operations in Virginia. Between 2003 and 2018, Duke increased electricity rates 25 percent over the previous decade. Duke stated that the bill was written without stakeholders input, shifted the risk of bad investments away from sharehold- ers and onto ratepayers, would have likely resulted in ratepayers being overcharged, and could have allowed Duke to pass $10 billion in coal ash cleanup and another $13 billion in "grid improvement" costs onto ratepayers.

Despite widespread public opposi- tion to the measure and only Duke’s support, it took state legislators nearly seven months to remove the provision from the final bill. This was not a normal legislative process, says Peter Ladford, general counsel for the nonprofit clean energy advocacy group North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association.

In mid-January, State Corporation Commission staff officers recommended that Duke proceed with its rate increase request. According to the U.S. Energy Infor- mation Administration, electric utility rates have more than doubled over the last two years, which is a stark contrast to previous years.

In Virginia’s 2019 election, voters and onto ratepayers, would have likely resulted in ratepayers being overcharged, and could have allowed Duke to pass $10 billion in coal ash cleanup and another $13 billion in “grid improvement” costs onto ratepayers.

2019 patterns of reviewing the bill, which, according to Bills introduced several bills opposed by Dominion that are aiming to reform energy regulatory structures. In January, Del. Mark Keam (D) and Del. LeeWare (R) introduced the Sunlight Act. The bill would limit monopoly earnings for the electric utility by restricting electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure, taking them out of local politics by requiring the utility to sell or lease their assets.

You also saw advocates and Duke engineers putting out all the steps.

In late 2019, Dominion Energy N.C. president taught Duke targeted the majority of their campaign contributions toward the candidates for the legislature and the North Carolina General Assembly. The bill would limit monopoly earnings for the electric utility by restricting electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure, taking them out of local politics by requiring the utility to sell or lease their assets.

The 2019 elections saw a stark contrast to previous years. With a new crop of state representa- tives and into the measure that only Duke’s support, it took state legislators nearly seven months to remove the provision from the final bill. In mid-January, State Corporation Commission staff officers recommended that Duke proceed with its rate increase request. According to the U.S. Energy Infor- mation Administration, electric utility rates have more than doubled over the last two years, which is a stark contrast to previous years.

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Beginning of the End of North Carolina’s Coal Ash Crisis

Special from the Appalachian Voices Front Porch Blog

By Cat McCur

On Jan. 2, North Carolina announced a historic settlement with one of the state’s most powerful corporations and polluters, Duke Energy. The settlement requires Duke to move nearly 390 million tons of toxic coal ash from six of its power plants to properly lined landfill cells close to the Dan River.

The announcement brings to a close years of struggle and endurance by citizens of the state who demanded full redress of the coal ash crisis that North Carolinians have been dealing with for nearly three decades. The settlement is part of a broader movement led by the nonprofit Environmental Law Center. The nonprofit advocacy organization that publishes this newspaper, was involved throughout the fight — reaching out to and standing with communities, pushing regulatory and politicians to do more, testing drinking water wells and surface water, and participating in the multifaceted legal fight led by the nonprofit Appalachian Voices.

The Dan River Disaster

In February 2014, 39,000 tons of coal ash spilled into the Dan River when the Dan River Site’s coal ash pond collapsed, releasing a massive amount of toxic ash into water bodies.

The communities began forming local groups to push out to other neighbors, and asking officials questions about the threats. After the Dan River spill, residents and other communities across the state rose up to demand that the legislature, state agencies and Duke Energy take over the coal ash crisis.

Within months, they gathered 9,000 signatures on a petition demanding that Duke take full financial responsibility for cleaning up the Dan River spill, and that it evacuate ash coal from nearby unlined pits to dried landfill.

Community voices kept intense public focus on the crisis long after the spill. These voices pushed the utility and state regulators (under the direction of then-Environmental Commissioner Denise Bailey-Lash, who had previously worked for 29 years at Duke Energy) to come to light in a tolerant state of state and national media reports.

The U.S. Attorney’s office launched a criminal investigation and a year later, in February 2015, reached a deal with Duke for $102 million for violations of the federal Clean Water Act.

Foot-dragging and Finger-pointing

Under intense pressure from citizens, the N.C. state legislature passed the Coal Ash Management Act in 2014, setting a framework for cleaning up Duke’s 8,000 coal ash pits around the state by 2020. The Dan River Site was among the first on the priority list and was scheduled to be closed by 2016.

But even after the next several years, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality’s proposed rules consistently fell short as the agency tried to advance a closure method known as “top-in-place” — essentially throwing a massive plastic sheet over the pits, which does not prevent toxins from leaking into drinking water. The agency also consistently stalled its priorities for cleanup.

In the state legislature, lawmakers tried to weaken the 2014 law while Duke Energy’s lawyers torpedoed permits for other coal ash facilities.

Electric Costs

From continued on page 13

Tennesseans Raise Coal Ash Concerns

by Molly Malone

Opposition to proposed coal ash landfill is running strong in Anderson County, Tennesse, and is scheduled to close by 2023, and the Tennessee Valley Authority plans to build a landfill nearby to store coal ash in the community of Clinton, Tenn.

The Tennessee Valley Authority’s proposal was approved by the state of Tennessee in March 2012, but Clinton has been home to more than its share of environmental woes. In November 2012, seven residents from the city of Clinton sued TVA to stop the ash landfill.

In January, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency closed comment periods for a proposal TVA had made to build an ash landfill near a river that TVA claimed was used for power generation.

The publicly owned utility has acknowledged that waste is leaking from the Cumberland Plant’s unlined coal ash ponds and plans to break ground on building a dry lined landfill in 2021.

Several local coal ash company allowed workers who cleaned up TVA’s 2008 Kingston coal ash spill under the direction of TVA’s subcontractor, Jacobs Engineering Group, to leave the job site in December 2018 without being paid for their work. The company allowed workers who cleaned up TVA’s 2008 Kingston coal ash spill under the direction of TVA’s subcontractor, Jacobs Engineering Group, to leave the job site in December 2018 without being paid for their work.

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Betraying the Farm on a “Wild West” Hemp Economy in Appalachia

Ever-changing laws and regulations, a saturated CBD market and high operating costs are stressing the region’s industrial hemp farmers

By Michael M. Barrick

A hemp economy in Appalachia is hot — literally and figuratively — of the growing hemp economy in West Virginia. That’s because the hemp farmers here in Monroe County and at the state Department of Agriculture for destroying much of their crop this past growing season because they were not able to harvest it. The hemp was over the 0.3 percent THC limit for industrial hemp. Those regulations were approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the federal farm bill that became law in December 2018. Many West Virginia farmers had difficulty staying under the THC ceiling because of the method the state used to test THC levels. As opposed to just testing deli-thc, as some other states have done, West Virginia also tests THCa — delta-9 THC. Delta-9 THC is the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. One reason is if it is found in industrial hemp. THC-a is non-psychoactive but can become deli-9 THC when heated. THC-a will increase THCa concentrations.

That won’t change in 2020 because the U.S. Department of Agriculture has temporarily adopted proposed regulations virtually identical to those used by West Virginia in 2019. The USDA closed the comment period on Jan. 31, 2020, for the establishment of a domestic hemp program under the 2018 Farm Bill, so through at least Nov. 1, 2021, the new guidelines will apply to farmers in every state. Prior to 2018, the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill stated that the only lawful purpose for which industrial hemp may be grown was for research conducted by an institute of higher learning or an agency of agriculture. The 2018 bill, however, identified hemp as an agricultural plant, not a controlled substance. The 2018 bill, however, identified hemp as an agricultural plant, not a controlled substance. The 2018 bill, however, identified hemp as an agricultural plant, not a controlled substance. The 2018 bill, however, identified hemp as an agricultural plant, not a controlled substance.

What is Hemp?

Hemp is a cannabis plant grown for its flowers, seeds, fibers and stalks and, as well as for biomass, where the entire plant is chopped up. It has been grown for thousands of years, even before the past, it was used as fiber, food, paper, fuel, textiles and rope, and it is one of the oldest domesticated plants. Its decline in production coincided with a legal federal restriction imposed upon it in 1967, as well as with technological advances such as the invention of nylon, which was first used in 1935. Then, in 1969, Congress passed the Controlled Substances Act, which with marijuana as a Schedule I substance, which also includes drugs such as heroin and LSD — meaning that it is considered to be among the most harmful illegal drugs. At one time, industrial hemp was distributed from marijuana.

“Literally Betraying the Farmers”

As farmers prepare for the 2020 season, a lot of them are so uncertain. Yet, each season offers new opportunities.

Experience, of course, is the best teacher. So, I met with five farmers in the western part of the state at the Union, W.Va, a tiny, no-stoplight town two-and-a-half years to build.

While Andrew is looking forward to the day he can use hemp grown in West Virginia, he dreams, “I wish the hemp was grown and processed in Kentucky, and we bred it to West Virginia. It is so similar geographically. According to Andrew, hemp is essentially bonded collagen-cellulose insulation. It is a composite of biomass and a mineral binder with many different strains. The hemp hurd, lime binder and water. The lime undergoes a chemical set when moistened, binding the hemp particles together. I visited the three of them at the home in late January, less than three months after the newly built house moved into it. Bob is a retired physician; he practiced in Hillsboro, Kentucky, and was a regional representative for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture before retiring. They have owned the land in one of the state’s most scenic counties for 15 years. The 1,700 square feet house took two-and-a-half years to build.

While the project was fraught at times because it was a new experience, in hindsight, sitting in their bright and spacious great room, it was clear the Musts were pleased with the risk they took. When I visited, it was around 66 degrees inside, while the actual temperature in the house on a cloudy day was 61. Energy efficiency is just one benefit of hempcrete. The material is used mainly as slab, slab and cool roofing. The air-tightness of hemp concrete particles creates its insulating properties up to 2.5 times the R-value of a common fiberglass insulating material. Hemp is relatively non-toxic, according to the American Lung Association. The air-tightness makes your home more comfortable in the winter and cooler in the summer. The air-tightness makes your home more comfortable in the winter and cooler in the summer.

Hemp Finds a Home

A hempcrete house high in the mountains of West Virginia demonstrates that industrial hemp is a viable alternative for homebuilders

By Michael M. Barrick

One of America’s greatest writers, Paul S. B. Black, was born in Hillsboro, W.Va, in 1892. Though she grew up in China as the daughter of missionaries, her novel, “The Good Earth,” which she gained her worldwide fame in the 1930s, seemed to spring out of the very mountains in which she was born.

It seems appropriate then that one of the first houses in West Virginia constructed with hempcrete was built here by Seven Rivers Designs, a local company owned by Andrew Must. Hempcrete comes from the hemp plant, which has been used for thousands of years by humans for numerous purposes and is one of the world’s oldest domesticated plants. It is commonly known as being high. A marijuana plant can have THC levels as low as 0.2 percent or more. Legal CBD, meanwhile, must be under 0.3 percent THC, so it does not get a person high; it is used to treat pain, including osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and inflammation.

Hemp by the Numbers

Hemp acreage licensed in 2019

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Hemp grower licenses granted in 2019

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<tr>
<td>Ranch</td>
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Data courtesy of VA Hemp
Growers went along with it. Here’s the label of ingredients and maybe do some is sell our story along with our product. appealing label. What we are trying to do people shop with their eyes and go for an many.

Blake Butler with the North Carolfi-...
The Impacts of Coal Bankruptcies

By Kevin Ridder

The year had scarcely begun when Eastern Kentucky coal mines once again found themselves in the way of a train full of coal to demand pay for weeks of work. About a dozen current and former American Resource companies told the courts on March 13 in Pike County, Ky., that they had not been paid since Dec. 27, according to the Lexington Herald-Leader.

This came not even six months after a flurry of bankruptcy filings in Pike County, Ky., against Revolution Energy and its parent Blackjewel, LLC, for unpaid wages and benefits to a worker-led protest in Harlan County, Kentucky. At the time of Revolution’s bankruptcy, it was a privately held coal company, according to the Lexington Herald-Leader. In 1977, coal companies have paid a fee on every ton of coal mined to the U.S. Government to fund the Abandoned Mine Land Enforcement, which funds the Abandoned Mine Land program. Through this program, state and local regulatory authorities fund state programs that are designed to reclaim mine-related problems that exist prior to 1977 and that go bankrupt or otherwise cannot pay.

The 1977 law requires companies to file a letter from the state Energy and Environmental Cabinet to declare bankruptcy. As of Feb. 5, the state regulators told the court in a letter those fees are among those that could face massive cancellation on Aug. 31.

Supports Grow for Mine Reclamation Bill

By Kevin Ridder

As of mid-February, seven Southeast Virginia localities passed resolutions calling for state legislative support to support reauthorization of a funding program for mine reclamation. A similar resolution was introduced in the House.

On Jan. 27, Virginia legislation was introduced that would allow for any unsold permits would be left to the companies’ hands. As a result, the miners could be held responsible for future coal bankruptcies.

As of Dec. 11, there some more than $5 billion in outstanding loans that were made by medical providers of the former miners. As a result, the federal government has paid for more than $7 billion in closure costs since 1977. AML funds, the state closed and leveled nearly 800,000 acres of land and water. Despite this, this is 350 feet above the water level. Under the Clean Water Act, the state closed and leveled nearly 800,000 acres of land and water. Despite this, this is the first time that reclamation has been cost-effective to hire out the reclamation work at the site. The fee for the reclamation fee is $500 million in cleanup costs. As a result, the federal government has paid for more than $7 billion in closure costs since 1977. AML funds, the state sealed the open portals and water polluted by acid mine drainage. After being awarded $172,200 in AML funds, the state closed and leveled nearly 800,000 acres of land and water. Despite this, this is the first time that reclamation has been cost-effective to hire out the reclamation work at the site.

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A Just Transition for Coal Communities

Stakeholders from across the country are collaborating on a path to a better economy for coal-impacted regions.

By Kevin Rabbitt

For decades, the coal industry has gone through cycles of boom and bust. When, on top of other factors, the price of natural gas plummeted in the early 2010s, communities that had long depended on coal were hit by the massive job losses that followed. Out of the 56,141 total coal jobs in 2000, only 11,544 remained in 2018, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

While Appalachia was heavily impacted by these job losses, workers also faced declines in places like the Powder River Basin and the Navajo Nation are also bearing the brunt of the coal industry’s decline. This has contributed to challenges such as poverty and declining infrastructure.

The Eastern Kentucky-based Appalachian Regional Commission, along with the nonprofit organizations that work with labor unions and communities across the country, are devising ways to foster economic development.

In Preston County and Whitesville, WV, for example, the nonprofits that are utilizing federal funds to transform old railroad tracks into economic growth opportunities are just two of the many examples of what an economic transition can look like: job retraining, small business creation, investment in education, and stimulating entrepreneurship.

According to Rooper, a Just Transition is not just relying on what’s already there. We must actually need to approach this challenge much more ambitiously, and we’ve got to know what is working, and what is not, in order to plan for the future.

Planning Process

As early as 2019, the Just Transition Fund began reaching out to its grantees and other partners across the country.

“We asked, what could we achieve if we bring communities together to advocate in what they know will work and what they need at the coal industry?” says Roper.

“Planning Process

In early 2019, the Just Transition Fund began reaching out to its grantees and other partners across the country. Binko states that now is the time to address economic shifts on a national level, and that the platform plays an important role in elevating the voices of those most affected by the decline of the coal industry.

“All of us together are thinking comprehensively on what these coal communities need and want from economic development strategies to put in place to meet infrastructure needs,” says Binko.

Defining the Future

Employment in the coal industry has declined by over 50 percent in Appalachia.

We are looking at a 70-year decline in the industry, which took place between 1940 and 1970. That’s drastically affecting our local economies, our infrastructure, and our communities.

The Just Transition Fund has a clear vision for the future.

According to Rooper, a Just Transition is not just focusing on workforce development. “The platform has been the important force throughout our community. The platform has been the importance of local leadership in defining that communities are a part of defining their own future. And the platform has been the important force throughout our community. The platform has been the importance of local leadership in defining that communities are a part of defining their own future. And the platform has been the important force throughout our community.”

Regional meetings were held across the country to include as many local voices as possible. Photo by Christine Gyovai

According to Rooper, a Just Transition for Coal Communities is particularly focused on workforce development. “In the next 20 to 30 years, what’s going to happen is that the cost of doing business is going to rise. Some of the jobs that have been in the past decades in Appalachia is what we’re seeing in real time in the near future,” says Hille. “In the next 20 to 30 years, we’re going to see the year of the Kayenta Mine. “The Kayenta Mine is utilize 36,000 people, some of the issues facing former coal-related communities in Appalachia relate to those in the Navajo Nation.”

“When we’re talking about decades in Appalachia is what we’re seeing in real time in the near future,” says Hille. “In the next 20 to 30 years, we’re going to see the year of the Kayenta Mine. “The Kayenta Mine is utilize 36,000 people, some of the issues facing former coal-related communities in Appalachia relate to those in the Navajo Nation.”

Just Transition Fund Co-founder and Executive Director Heidi Binko, left, speaks with Just Transition Fund Executive Director Heidi Binko and Western Organis-
A conversation with Appalachian Voices’ Kate Boyle

The energy landscape is changing as clean power becomes competitive with fossil fuels. These two changes are impacting millions of people across the region — but whether the benefits of clean energy are shared by all remains to be seen. Renewable energy is a game changer for the environ-
ment, but, like all technology, it is not inherently equitable. Creating an equitable energy system takes deliberate intervention by decision-makers and advocates. 

What does “equity” mean when we are talking about renewable energy and energy efficiency? Kate Boyle

When I started work, they told me that I was the first African-American community of Union Hill. It’s a fracked-gas compressor station in the historic African-American community of Union Hill, which was also home to the Charleston Gas Company. In 2013, the company announced plans to build a new compressor station in Union Hill, which would supply natural gas to its customers in the Charleston area. The announcement sparked widespread opposition among residents, who were concerned about the potential health impacts of exposure to fracked-gas emissions.

Kate: It means no one is left out — every- one should be able to access the benefits of economic development that is achieved unless policies and programs are designed properly, and we ask, “aren’t we doing more low-income communities benefiting from solar?” The answer could be that programs in that community are only available to homeowners who can afford to buy a solar system. If a program requires a customer to pay for the system up front, which is too much for a person who is living in poverty, then it is not equitable. We need to make sure that programs are designed so that all people have access to them.

What are some examples of clean energy programs in Appalachia and beyond? Kate: There are a lot of success stories when you look at energy efficiency. Appalachian Electric Cooperative in East Tennessee launched a program in 2019 that eliminates the upfront cost of making home energy upgrades. Instead, customers can apply for financing from the utility to pay for significant home energy efficiency improvements and appliance upgrades. Once the improvements are made, the customer repays the utility over time through an additional charge on their monthly electric bill. Ideally, savings on a customer’s power bill as a result of the improvements at a rate that is guaranteed for the next 15 years. Participants’ household income must be below 80 percent of their area’s median income, and renters can also participate. Appalachian Voices has been advocating for a similar program that is under development in Virginia and will be overseen by the Clean Energy Advisory Board.

How should we go about bringing equitable clean energy to more people in our region? Kate: Awareness is paramount. In the past, we’ve seen programs fail because there wasn’t enough awareness about them. We need to make people aware of the benefits of clean energy and how it can help people save money. We’ve also seen that awareness is not enough — we need to make sure that programs are designed so that all people have access to them.

What do policy-makers need to keep in mind when it comes to energy? Kate: First, when energy policies result in a transition from one fuel to another, the impacts of that shift should be considered. Many states have put plans into place to help the workforce transition to new industries. We need to consider the impacts of a sit-down strike, like decreased tax revenue that can affect public services. Second, we need to consider how much control the other side of the equation — the policy-makers — should have. Is it fair that coal miners are being selected to retrain for new careers? We need to consider the impacts on the coal miners, and the job we do, and the dirt and the fight we deal with,” says Vance. “When they hear these stories about black lung, some people don’t want to believe it. But when we go meet them and show them the truth about what’s actually happening today, we can get some of them on our side.”
Hemp
Continued from carespread

18 different hemp strains, only three of those have a total THC below that threshold,” Bryant writes in an email. “Additionally, those three strains have very low CBD content, so the two are proportionally to each other, i.e. low total THC equals low total CBD.”

But for hemp to succeed, sales are needed somewhere between 4 to 16 percent CBD, and 10 percent is considered average, growers and retailers say. The higher the CBD level, the stronger the medicinal benefits. Bryant adds, “CBD is not really used for anything at the retail level at the retail level. However, we and hemp growers are looking at manufacturing practices to ensure a properly labeled product. From what I’ve seen and heard, hemp has become a global product and for an appealing label. What we are trying to do is sell our stuff and sell it for the right price in the marketplace and we need to declare the label of ingredients and maybe do some research on the company, if possible, as

A tree-sit in the path of the Mountain Valley Pipelines

In 2018, the year before the bill became law, the state’s economic development agency, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, announced it would award research grants to centerspread

Hempcrete
Continued from carespread

If our crops spike up high and above 0.3 percent THC, we simply cannot convert to medical hemp status. Processing can therefore do and control the amount of THC in the hemp manufacturing plant at the end of the hemp harvest. In fact, around 10% of the hemp harvested in the United States is sold for nonmedical use, according to Commercial Appeal. As of March 2019, Virginia legislature considered a bill that would face a minimum fine of $10,000. Non-growers who did not collaborate face much less than that. The penalty for improperly screening THC levels in the post-harvest testing process would face a minimum fine of $100.

Smith says that Virginia hemp farmers who do not yet meet state and federal THC requirements should not worry too much. “We are all in the same boat, and we all have to work together to get there,” he said. “If we continue to work together, we can achieve our goals.”

Continued on next page

Cultural and economic diversity

Additional hemp legislation that would provide clear definitions of hemp and hemp products and the legal distinctions between hemp and marijuana was introduced in the Virginia legislature in 2020. The bill, sponsored by Delegate Don Beyer (D-Alexandria) and Senator Richard Saslaw (D-Fairfax), proposed to make it illegal to possess more than 24x4 for instead of deeper studies. Larger data sets, such as 2x4x4 will help us to understand the conditions and grow hemp in the optimal way. The process is a step-by-step process to build just to allow room for insula
tion that is necessary with hempcrete panels. The hempcrete panels are combined with a "perfect scenario" would come in and take enough orders to make a substantial amount of material. However, the legislature is not scheduled to vote on January 17. The blockade in Elliston, Va., was put in place to mount for Mountain Valley developers. The Virginia legislature would make impeding a disgraceful pattern of noncompliance that has been ongoing work since began in stage of the protective fabric in early February. The state of West Virginia has gotten challenges — because of the way THC has the net effect of ruining the crop. If convicted, those who engage in this common protest tactic would face a minimum fine of $1,000, and one in four Virginia hemp farmers could face a fine. Farmers who do not sign up for the hemp program would face a minimum fine of $10,000. Welders who do not sign compliance would face much less than that. The penalty for improperly screening THC levels in the post-harvest testing process would face a minimum fine of $100.

In the light of many challenges faced by hemp farmers, Barbola Vilk, the CEO of West Virginia’s hemp company, says farmers and all in the industry must adopt a spirit of reciprocity. In the face of all the changes and challenges, it is crucial for one another to keep the focus on the task at hand and to continue to find ways to have meaningful interactions. If it all does not include adjustment, says Don Smith, with West Virginia’s Agri Carb Electric Corporation, a company that is looking for and developing markets for their hemp products in these early stages of the industry, it would seem that hemp has found a home — in homes. To learn more about why and how hempcrete is used in building, contact Andrew at (540) 324-5063 to learn more about North Carolina’s hempcrete

Blake Butler with the North Caroli

Continued from page 8

“Everyone’s selling it. It’s a craze. From what I’ve seen and heard, hemp has become a global product and for an appealing label. What we are trying to do is sell our stuff and sell it for the right price in the marketplace and we need to declare the label of ingredients and maybe do some research on the company, if possible, as well as look for a sealed container.”

Blake Butler with the North Caroli

Continued from page 8

All states in Central and Southern Appalachia have legalized industrial hemp. Yet, as the 2020 growing season approaches, the new USDA rules are hindering the farmers’ growth.

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This Green House

Getting Started Gardening

Make 2020 a year of new growth

By Eliza Laubach

When the daffodils flower and the trees bud new leaves, the urge to grow seems as strong as a spring replenished anew. Planting a garden connects one to the life force emerging all around, and brings blessings of food and beauty as the year goes on. Gardens were once a staple of rural mountain life. Trees and brush were no longer as common and starting over was the first time for a lifetime.

But the benefits are many. Growing food builds local resilience as the food you grow and share is more nutritious, and brings benefits to the environment. Appalachia has many rural areas where U.S. Department of Agriculture defines as low-income areas where a substantial number of residents have little to no access to a supermarket.

1. Make a garden plan

A garden plan will provide direction and increase chances of success. Thoughtfully consider your garden’s location, so that it is integrated with other aspects of the home. Think about garden access, orientation to the sun, and the time and future plans for the garden. The closer the garden to the house, the more it will be visited. Perennials can be planted later than annuals, but the planning considerations are the same.

Some questions to consider for the site:

• Where is the southern exposure on the property, which catches the sun without direct shade?
• If you may implement future waste, think about ideal garden placement in relation to a rainsaver, cistern system or a pond.
• What will the garden look like?

Think about the available space on your property. Will you be able to grow a lawn, building raised beds or container gardening?

2. Pick out your favorite vegetables and herbs

Grovew what you love, and feed the dream of growing food. Order a seed catalog from a local or regional heirloom seed company, such as Sow True Seeds or Asheville, N.C., and pick out what is most valuable. Kale and radishes are great to start with, as they are hardy and grow quickly.

These companies stock heirloom seeds that are grown in the region, which are already in tune with the Appalachian climate. Heirloom vegetable and herb varieties have more nutrients and are better adapted to pests and diseases. They also attract beneficial insects that pollinate your garden, and certain biennials, such as marigolds and chives, produce essential oils that attract predators for pests. Companion planting is an established practice that groups herbs and vegetables together for optimum growing potential and pest protection.

Find out the plant hardness zone and frost-free date for your region, and strategize accordingly. Seed catalogs are helpful guides. Make plans to start seeds or purchase vegetable starts, ideally from market farmers or local nurseries.

3. Connect with other gardeners and agricultural extension agents

Other gardeners will provide tips, community and helpful encouragement. Perhaps this is an opportunity to connect with your neighbor who has a flourishing garden, or a local club. Look up local social media gardening groups on Facebook or NextDoor. This is also a great way to get seeds directly from seed-savers!

For establishing lawn turf, a square shovel and hoes are the most helpful, and most labor-intensive. A broadfork or strong pitchfork is a great way to loosen soil without tilling. If a rototiller is your choice, disturb the soil as little as possible. Always cover bare soil with straw (not hay!) or leaf mulch to sustain the life of microbes that live in the soil. If Bermudagrass is present, be diligent in knowing for sure how much they pay can be found at 2020census.gov/jobs. The Philadelphia office, covering Southern Appalachia, has an equal employment opportunity (EEO) statement that works great if you have a question or a concern.

Access the answers to many questions can be found at 2020census.gov. How many households received a postcard in mid-March? Will they receive training. The Trump administration’s attempt to add a question to the Census has made many non-citizens, and citizens with undocumented status, wary of the 2020 Census. Following a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court, the proposed question was dropped. Census workers will ask for an ID badge. To verify citizenship, the Census uses anti-fraud technology, and residents are asked to take photos. The field is also asked to verify one’s citizenship status, and the census has no legal recourse. The Census Bureau is designing a privacy plan that includes a 10-digit badge.

“Why it’s important we have a large applicant pool from these hard-to-count areas,” he says. These temporary Census jobs pay from around $13.50 an hour to $21.25 an hour, depending on local policy, and have flexible hours, according to Maddaloni, who encouraged interested job-seekers to apply at 2020census.gov/jobs. Applicants have to go through a formal background check and will receive training.

“Could it be a second job for some,” says Maddaloni. “We need more people to apply to make sure we can get an accurate count.”

There are steps that states and communities should take to ensure an accurate count, according to Allen. Her organization is working with the Virginia Census program designed to help states and localities educate and encourage residents to take part in the Census. Committees are set up vital for Appalachian and communities. They build a citizenship list from other data. Census workers will ask for assistance in person if the household does not respond to repeated requests to fill out the Census. Census workers will ask for assistance in person if the household does not respond to repeated requests to fill out the Census.
Sneaky Invaders

By Carolina Norman

Many invasive species are hiding in plain sight at plant nurseries, waiting for unsuspecting gardeners to scoop them up and bring them to a new yard to suffer a similar fate. The Appalachian region harbors some of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the country, but plants introduced by humans threaten the region’s ecology as they encroach on native plant species.

Invasive plants are often characterized by fast growth rates, efficient seed production, and adaptability in various climatic conditions, which are especially problematic in human-dominated ecosystems where such species are better able to outcompete and displace native species. Aggressive invasive species often pose a serious threat to local plant communities and can have significant impacts on the environment and human health.

To prevent the spread of invasive species, it’s important to buy from reputable nurseries and to research the plants before purchasing them. Local landscape organizations can provide guidance on what native species should be planted in the region.

The Energy Report

President Donald Trump announced sweeping rollbacks to the National Environmental Policy Act in January. The law gives the public an opportunity to be involved in major permitting decisions that affect the environment and public health.

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In January, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed protecting 46 stream miles of the North Fork of the Clarion River as habitat for two endangered species, the Big Sandy crayfish and the Clarion River crayfish. This means that developers of any federal-funded or permitted projects in the area would need to consult with the agency beforehand.

Bats are especially problematic in human-dominated ecosystems in the country, but plants introduced by humans threaten the region’s ecology as they encroach on native plant species.

The pear tree, also known as Pyrus calleryana, is a tree that was widely cultivated in the United States. The tree is native to China and Japan, where it is known as Callery “Bradford.” It is a fast-growing tree that is often used in urban landscaping due to its attractive form and resistance to disease.

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Solar, Environmental Justice and Utility Reform in Virginia

Appalachian Voices and our partners have been working hard for over a decade to protect the water and air of Appalachia from the dirty energy companies that profit from polluting it. In the past year, our work has been particularly significant. We’ve been working to ensure that Appalachian communities are not left behind as the nation moves away from coal, while ensuring clean and affordable energy for all. We’ve been working to ensure that Appalachian communities are not left behind as the nation moves away from coal, while ensuring clean and affordable energy for all.

Welcoming New Members to Our Board of Directors

Bill Bailey grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania, before moving to Washington, D.C., where he earned his master’s degree. After two decades in operations, marketing, training, and human resources, he joined the N.C.-based Appalachian Voices in 2013 and served in that position until 2015.

Bill Bailey

Advocating for Abandoned Mine Cleanup Bills

Thousands of miles of abandoned mine land are scattered across the state, waiting for regulations that could protect the lives and properties of those who live near them. The Appalachian Voices has been advocating for stricter regulations on abandoned mine land for over a decade. We’ve been working with state officials and representatives to pass laws that would ensure that abandoned mine land is cleaned up and that the people who live near it are protected.

We also bid a fond farewell to Pat Abbott, who retired in 2013. Pat was a dedicated member of our Board of Directors and has contributed significantly to the work we do.

John Deavenport

Solarize Southwest Virginia

Solarize Southwest Virginia is the Appalachian Voices project to help communities in the region save money on their energy costs and reduce their carbon footprint. We’ve been working with communities to identify potential solar projects and to help them through the process of installing solar panels on their homes and businesses.

Come See Us in Durham!

Appalachian Voices is hosting several events in Durham this month. We’re hosting a town hall meeting on the future of Duke Energy, as well as a series of community meetings to discuss the potential impacts of expanding Duke Energy’s coal plants. We’re also hosting a series of events to discuss the potential impacts of expanding Duke Energy’s coal plants.

No Rate Hikes for Dirty Energy!

In January, we attended rate hike hearings for Duke Energy Carolinas. We were joined by a crowd of concerned citizens who shared their stories about how Duke Energy’s rate hikes would impact their lives.

Member Spotlight

Tom McIntosh Services in Action by Carolina Northington

“We have to take care of the environment,” says Tom McIntosh. “It’s the air we breathe, the water we drink, where we recreate. You know, it’s our stuff.”

Tom is one of the first residents in North Carolina to have solar panels installed on his home. He cites environmental problems he has seen around the country as a reason for his support of a bill that would prevent communities from being forced to choose where they get their electricity.

See the status of these bills and contact your or representative at appvoices.org/wa-legislation-2020.

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Hemp farmer Don Smith, II, stands proudly next to his field in Tornado, W.Va. Smith works for a company focused on developing markets for industrial hemp. Like many in the fledgling industry, he is finding that growing and selling hemp has challenges as well as promise. Turn to the centerspread to read more. Photo courtesy of Don Smith, II.