What Can Congress Do?

The Clean Water Protection Act, H.R. 2169

For 25 years, the Clean Water Act (CWA) allowed for the granting of permits to place "fill material" into waters of the United States, provided that the primary purpose of the "filling" was not for waste disposal. The intention was to prevent industries such as coal mining from using the nation's waterways as waste disposal sites. That changed in 2002, when the Army Corps of Engineers, under the direction of the Bush administration and without congressional approval, altered its longstanding definition of "fill material" to include mining waste. This change accelerated the devastating practice of mountaintop removal coal mining and the destruction of more than 1,000 miles of Appalachian streams.

To curtail this devastation, Representatives Frank Pallone and Christopher Shays have introduced the Clean Water Protection Act—a simple piece of legislation that restores the original intent of the Clean Water Act to clarify that fill material cannot be comprised of mining waste. Passing this legislation would protect all the nation's rivers, streams, and lakes from being used as garbage dumps for mining waste. It would also help end the destruction of the Appalachian Mountains.

Please join Representatives Frank Pallone and Christopher Shays as a co-sponsor of the Clean Water Protection Act, H.R. 2169.

To co-sponsor, please contact the office of Rep. Frank Pallone at 202-225-4671.

Where to Learn More about Mountaintop Removal

www.iLoveMountains.org

A website of local, state, and regional organizations from 5 Appalachian states working together to end mountaintop removal and create a prosperous future for the region.

www.stopmountaintopremoval.org

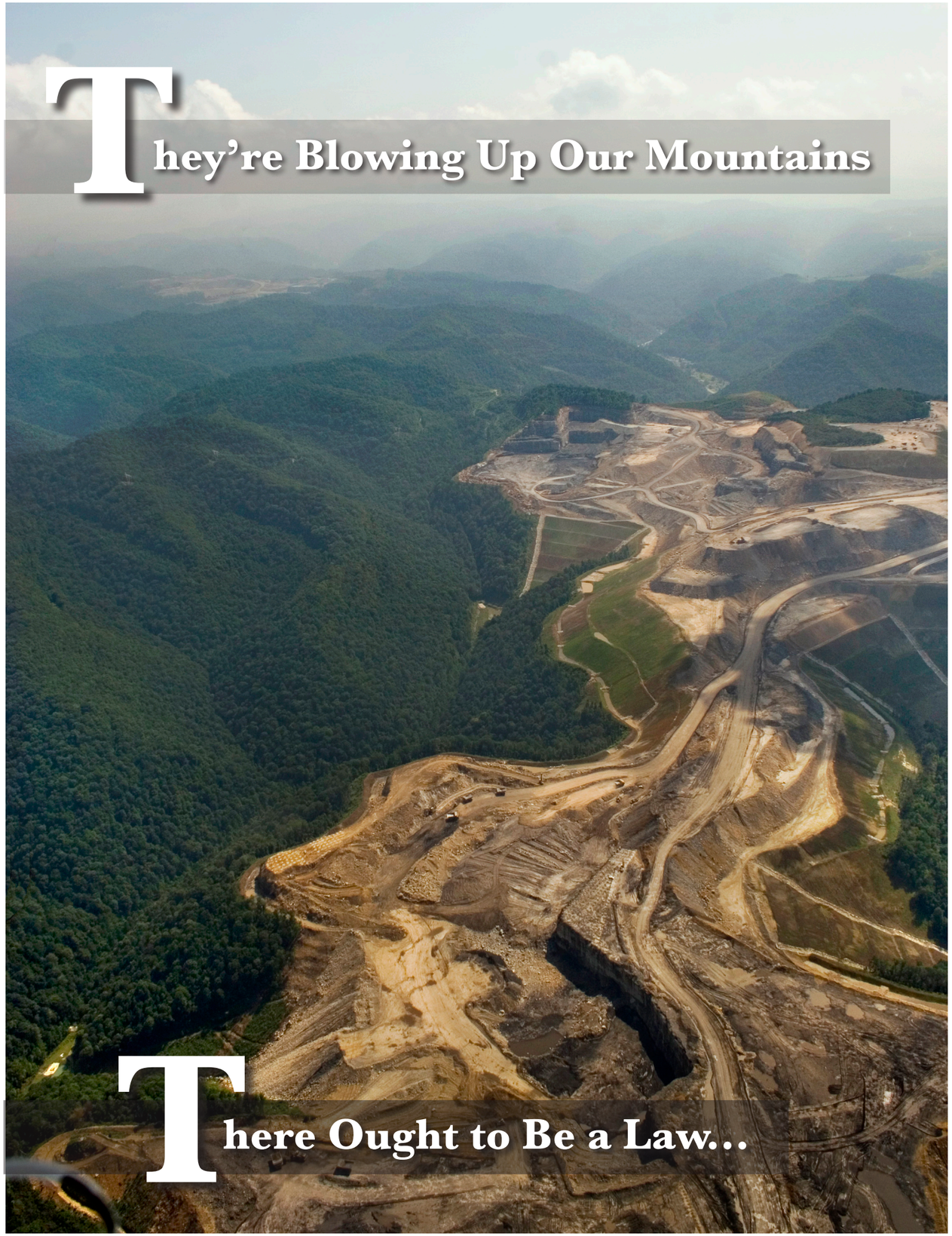
The website of a coalition of local West Virginia organizations and Earthjustice dedicated to stopping the harmful practice of mountaintop removal mining in Appalachia.

"Appalachian Mountaintop Removal" layer in Google Earth

The organizations sponsoring iLoveMountains.org have teamed up with Google to feature an "Appalachian Mountaintop Removal" layer in the popular Google Earth software. Revealing the locations of hundreds of mountains destroyed by mountaintop removal, this feature connects users to photos, maps, videos and first-hand accounts from impacted people and communities. To view, check the "Global Awareness" box in the latest version of Google Earth (earth.google.com).

This document was produced by the Alliance for Appalachia, which includes the following organizations: Appalachian Citizens Law Center, Appalachian Voices , Appalshop, Coal River Mountain Watch, Heartwood, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth, MACED, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Save Our Cumberland Mountains, Sierra Club Central Appalachia Environmental Justice Program, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, Southwings, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy

They're Blowing Up Our Mountains



There Ought to Be a Law...

What is Mountaintop Removal?

Destruction of the Landscape

Every day in the mountains of Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee, more than 6 million pounds of explosives are detonated. Every week, giant strip mines across Appalachia use the explosive force of a Hiroshima-sized atomic bomb to blow up the nation's oldest mountains, removing as much as 800 feet of elevation to unearth seams of coal.

The largest and most destructive of these new types of strip mining is called mountaintop removal. Rather than using miners to take coal out of the mountains, mountaintop removal mines involve blasting mountaintops into rubble and dumping the resulting waste and debris into surrounding valleys and headwater streams – streams that supply drinking water to millions of Americans.

The Appalachian forests and streams impacted by mountaintop removal contain a greater diversity of life than almost anywhere on earth outside of the tropical rainforests. But mountaintop removal is destroying far more than forests and mountains, it's devastating communities and a culture that has endured in these mountains for hundreds of years. Communities near mountaintop removal mines are threatened by rockslides, catastrophic floods, poisoned water supplies, constant blasting, destroyed property, and lost lives.

But mountaintop removal is not necessary to meet America's energy needs –it accounts for less than 10% of US coal production .

Blast at Surface Mine on Shumate Branch, West Virginia
Photo by Giles Ashford

"Our lives used to be a dream come true."

Maria Gunnoe
Bobwhite, WV

Family Impact

Generations of Maria Gunnoe's family enjoyed the view of the mountains from the front porch of the house where she lives today. Her home place was once a lush green paradise of fruit trees, vegetable gardens and a mountain stream, purchased by her grandfather in 1951 on a salary of $18 per week from mining coal.

But in 2006, Maria was forced to watch the obliteration of the view from her front porch as a mountaintop removal operation leveled those very mountains.

"My children will never know the beauty, culture or heritage that the generations before them intended on passing on to them," says Maria.

Joan Linville and Maria Gunnoe protesting in Charleston, WV. Photo by Builder Levy.

Without the forests to absorb rainfall, flooding has increased dramatically since the mining began. In 3 years, Maria's land was flooded 7 times, wiping out her bridge so that she no longer has road access to her home. One of the floods dragged the family dog out of his collar and swept him away while the family stood nearby helpless to save him from the raging waters.

About how mountaintop removal has changed her life, Maria says, "Our lives used to be a dream come true. Every child in the neighborhood used to come here and play. Now my children have to go somewhere else and play. It's hard to believe that there isn't a safe place for them to play here now. Our lives have changed in every way anyone could possibly imagine.

"My children sit up at night during heavy rain events. When they do sleep, they sleep fully clothed, just in case they have to escape the water in a hurry. No child - or adult, for that matter - should have to endure this constant hell.

"People ask me why we don't move. In order to move, you have to be able to afford to move. Our place is worthless thanks to all the land surrounding us being annihilated. Anyone would be crazy to buy real estate in a wasteland."

“The way it’s going now no one’s ever going to have a job...”

Lucious Thompson
McRoberts, KY

Community Impact

Lucious Thompson and his granddaughters, Destiny Clark and Delena Brooks, 2002. Photo by Builder Levy.

After mountaintop removal coal mining started above the community of McRoberts, KY, the community experienced three one hundred-year floods in ten days. Local resident Lucious Thompson described the devastation this way:

“The good things disappearing are the trees, the wildlife. The streams of water have stopped running. And that’s some of the good parts of life.

“It’s nerve-wracking; you can’t sleep at night like you used to. You can’t enjoy yourself. The coal trucks will run you off the road - they run 24 hours a day. The noise will kill you; the dust will kill you. You can’t keep your house clean because of the dust. They’ll come right down to your back door if you don’t stop them. They will really hurt you.

“Years ago there was wall-to-wall people. Everyone had a job. The way it’s going now, no one’s ever going to have a job in this area. I figure in 10 years this will be a ghost town. Tumbleweeds will be going down the road. This place will never be like it used to be.”

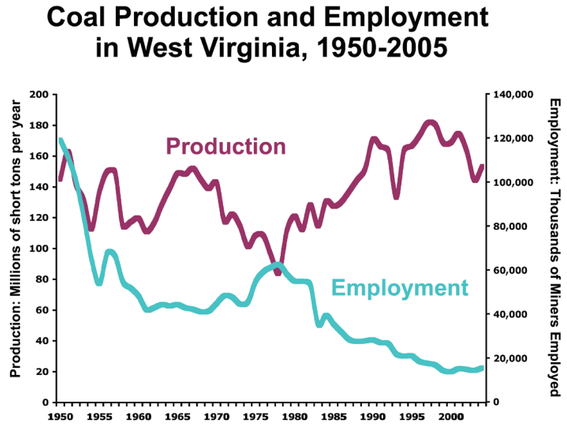
“...mile after mile of forest-covered range, great swaths of Appalachia, in some places as far as the eye can see, are being blasted and obliterated in one of the greatest acts of physical destruction this country has ever wreaked upon itself.”

– Vanity Fair, May 2006

Devastation of Communities

Kenny Stroud’s home in Rawl, WV. Photo by Melissa Farlow, printed in Time Magazine on 23 March, 2008.

Imagine turning on your tap one day and finding your drinking water looked like tomato soup and smelled like rotten eggs. That’s exactly what has happened to families all across the Apppalachian coalfields. With natural resources such as beautiful mountain landscapes, wildlife habitat and clean water destroyed – the same resources that have fueled rapid economic growth elsewhere in Appalachia - people of the Coalfields are left with few economic opportunities. What business person wants to open a new business in an area where the water is polluted and there are blasts from nearby mines powerful enough to crack the foundations of homes?



Mountaintop removal is a mining technique designed, from the very start, to take the coal miner out of coal mining. According to the West Virginia Coal Association, in the early 1950’s there were more than 125,000 miners employed in West Virginia; in 2004 there were just over 16,000. During that time, coal production increased. As a result, coal-bearing counties of Appalachia are some of the poorest in the nation, despite the fact that some of the greatest wealth is being extracted from them.

Where is Mountaintop Removal Happening?

Mountaintop Removal Facts

- The explosive equivalent of 58 Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs is detonated every year by coal companies in Appalachia.

  - Based on the USGS Explosives Yearbook, 2005

- At least 474 mountains have been destroyed and more than 1 million acres leveled by mountaintop removal and related forms of surface mining in Central Appalachia in just the last few decades.

  - Satellite-based maps produced by Appalachian Voices (2006) and Skytruth (2007),

- Between 1950 and 2004, the number of mining jobs in West Virginia declined from 125,000 to 16,000. During this period, coal production in the state increased.

  - Based on West Virginia Coal Association figures

- More than 100 million lbs of heavy metals could be leached into the drinking water supply of many eastern and midwestern U.S. cities from the waste already created by surface mining in central Appalachia.

  - Wilson Orr, USGS Science Impact Center, 2006.

- Less than 10% of America's coal production comes from mountaintop removal and, according to the US Geologic Survey, there was only enough recoverable coal left in Appalachian coal beds and coal zones in 2000 "to last for the next one to two decades at current production."

  - USGS, 2002.