Appalachian Voices is committed to protecting the land, air and water of the central and southern Appalachian region. Our mission is to empower people to defend our region’s rich natural and cultural heritage by providing them with tools and strategies for successful grassroots campaigns. Appalachian Voices sponsors the Upper Watauga Riverkeeper® and is also a Member of the Waterkeeper® Alliance.

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Cover photo: The cover photo by Nancy Tunsil as taken north along the Blue Ridge Parkway in the Shenandoah Mountains.
Climb for the Water! Sept. 25-26: A group of mountaineers will sleep under the stars to raise funds for Headwaters Outfitters of Rosman, NC. Visit headwatersoutfitters.com or call 828-222-1445 for details.

Watauga River Clean Up Sept. 25: Be a part of the solution, participate in Big Sweep 2010! Last year, 172 volunteers collected over 12,000 lbs of trash in Watauga County! To get involved, contact Wendy_Patoprsty@ncsu.edu or call 264-3061.

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October 1, 2-3: Chef Don Davis will present a demonstration on fire-cooking techniques over a crackling open fire. The meal will be served to participants at the historic Blue Ridge Mountains. Visit AppalachianVoices.com to reserve your place.

October 2-3: The American Adventure, a Civil War reenactment, will be held at Roanoke Mountain. Visit Appalachiainmatrix.com or call 540-773-6154 for details.

October 2-3: Celebrate the fall harvest at the “Appalachian Renaissance Festival.” The festival will feature music, food, and traditional crafts. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

October 3: Join the Appalachian Voices for a fun and educational day at the Big Sweep. Help clean up the Watauga River and learn about sustainable living practices. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

October 4: Experience the power of poetry at the 11th annual “Appalachian Authors’ Day.” Authors will read from their latest works and discuss their experiences in the Appalachian region. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

October 5: Participate in the exciting “Blue Ridge Mountains Bike Race.” The race will feature scenic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and challenging terrain. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

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Over 500 volunteers are expected to attend the Big Sweep 2010, a clean-up event that focuses on preserving the beauty of the Watauga River. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

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November 14: Participate in the exciting “Blue Ridge Mountains Bike Race.” The race will feature scenic views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and challenging terrain. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

November 15: Join the Appalachian Voices for a fun and educational day at the Big Sweep. Help clean up the Watauga River and learn about sustainable living practices. Visit AppalachianVoices.com for more information.

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NauHaus—A Sustainable Home For Today

By Maureen Halsema

Combining ancient building methods with modern science, a group of engineers and scientists are striving to change the world through structural design.

The goal: to create a carbon neutral home and increase the structure’s efficiency by 90 percent.

Welcome to the Nauhaus—a prototype home in Asheville, N.C., designed by the Nauhaus Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing sustainable building design and living solutions.

“We want to change how we build in this country,” said Jeff Buscher, Nauhaus Institute engineer and designer of the prototype home. “We think that there are a lot of opportunities for improvement and we have combined a lot of ideas to show people the way things could be.”

According to the design plan, the building would offset its own construction carbon footprint—with zero net energy. This means that the house would produce more energy than it consumes.

“In order to be carbon neutral, we calculate that the building will need to produce 200 percent more energy than it will use,” said Clarke Snell, managing director of the Nauhaus Institute. “We can do this with a six or seven kilowatt photovoltaic system.”

Incorporating renewable energy resources, implementing passive solar design and using high-efficiency appliances can also help accomplish this carbon neutrality feat.

A Liveable Space

At 1,700 square feet, the Nauhaus is smaller than the average American home. The interior space includes two bedrooms and one bath, and a one bedroom, one bath “mother-in-law” apartment.

The smaller design is supplemented by the incorporation of 300 square feet of outdoor living space—such as the sleeping porch off of the master bedroom—that make the house feel larger and help facilitate air movement and natural lighting.

The smaller design also provides the property space needed to develop a garden and natural habitats for local wildlife.

“The idea is to blur the line where outside and inside meet,” Buscher said. The house is designed to reduce water demands by implementing several water conservation measures, such as rain catchment, greywater irrigation and waterless composting toilets.

In order to reduce the environmental footprint associated with the construction of the house, many of the materials used in its construction are recycled or locally harvested, such as stone, salvaged brick and timber. The flooring materials are composed of compressed dirt from the site.

Pushing the Envelope

One of the fundamentals of passive solar design is to develop an efficient building “envelope,” to prevent energy loss from the home.

“The envelope is the skin of the house,” said Buscher. “It’s what separates the indoor condition space from the outdoors, keeping the weather out and the heat in.”

The Nauhaus team has insulated the house using a product called hempcrete, a unique combination of hemp chips—known as shiv (a waste product of hemp plants)—and a lime-based binder.

The Nauhaus prototype is one of the first houses built in the U.S. using hempcrete, which has a higher thermal resistance than that of straw bale construction or earthen mixtures. It replaces the need for traditional fiberglass insulation and drywall construction materials, creating a superior airtight envelope and enhancing the structure’s energy efficiency.

Hempcrete is known as water absorbent—it can absorb water vapor and hold it without rotting, then release the vapor back to the air when humidity levels drop, creating a breathable wall structure. This prevents mold issues inherent to some straw bale structures. The hempcrete’s increased response to humidity also improves indoor air quality.

Hempcrete is a flexible product that can be adapted for other uses, such as a soil. Hempcrete is not available in the U.S., however, and was imported from the United Kingdom for the project.

The Nauhaus concept seeks to turn the upfront cost of the house into long-term savings on utilities and maintenance. The designers hope to use the prototype as a learning model to demonstrate the financial, environmental and social benefits of the initial investment.

The house is open for tours every Saturday; visit TheNauhaus.com to sign up for a tour.
Turning Trash Into Glass

FORMER LANDFILL FUELS THE PURSUIT OF ART

By Maureen Halsema

Nestled in the Black Mountains of western North Carolina, lies a unique twist on a trash heap.

In 1994, creative minds from Yancey and Mitchell counties came together to discuss the closure of their 21-year-old landfill in Burnsville, N.C. From that mountain of trash sprouted an innovative solution: art studios and green houses fueled and radiantly heated by landfill gas, known as the EnergyXchange.

The Trash Into Gas

As the waste decomposes, a combination of two green house gases is formed—methane and carbon dioxide. When landfills are not equipped with a collection system, the landfill gas is eventually released into the atmosphere, further perpetuating the greenhouse effect.

“Landfills are the largest anthropogenic cause of methane emissions,” said Miriam Makhyoun, research assistant at the Appalachian State University Energy Center in Boone, N.C.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, methane gas is 23 times more effective at trapping heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

When captured and burned, however, methane gas is converted to carbon dioxide, reducing its impact on the atmosphere and helping to curb the effects of global warming.

The Economic Xchange

The EnergyXchange estimates that over the course of the landfill’s 20 to 25-year gas producing cycle, they will have saved $1 million in energy costs.

After conducting a feasibility study of the center, the EPA determined that the project’s environmental impact is equivalent to planting 14,000 acres of trees or taking 21,000 cars off the road in North Carolina each year.

An Artisan Impact

In addition to the clay and glass studios, the EnergyXchange campus is also home to four greenhouses featuring horticulture and aquaculture projects, seven cold frames and a craft gallery where visitors can purchase artwork from the resident artisans.

The residencies offered by the EnergyXchange allow artists to create pottery and glasswork using the methane gas free of charge, significantly reducing the inherent costs associated with these arts. They also help mentor artists in developing the business aspect of their work, offering a gallery to market their creations.

“A lot of the artists that stay with us and do the residency program end up staying in the region and continue their own artist businesses,” said Dan Asher, executive director of the EnergyXchange. “It adds more artisans and money to the economy while giving them the opportunity to establish the ability to do that.”

The campus greenhouses are famous for their native rhododendrons and azaleas, particularly the Flame azalea, all grown from locally collected seeds. There is also a demonstration aquaponics project featuring a tilapia fish farm that recirculates water from the tanks to herbaceous plants.

The EnergyXchange is both a haven for artisans and native horticulturalists and a teaching center, serving as a prototype for economic diversification and energy recovery programs.

“We are supporting the economy as a demo and model type place,” Asher said.

“Just in the past five months, we had government and tourism officials and artists visit from Canada, India, Mexico and Brazil to look at our project and bring it home with them. We estimate about 3,000 to 5,000 visitors a year at the EnergyXchange.”

The center currently supplements the landfill gas energy with solar panels, wood wastes and cooking oil in preparation for the sustainable transition when the gas resource is exhausted.

“We are looking into other options in the years to come, so we are ready for when the gas does go out,” Asher said. “Sort of a piece-by-piece transition off the landfill gas.”

To find out more about this project, artisan residencies or to check out their gallery, click to EnergyXchange.org.

Gas from the Yancey-Mitchell landfill fuels the studios’ glass oven. Photos by EnergyXchange.
Patagonia Footwear and Mast General Store will donate $10 to Appalachian Voices for each pair of Patagonia shoes you purchase in September.

Be an advocate for the places you love; support local conservation efforts.
Keeping On the Sunny Side  CARTER FAMILY FOLD SURVIVES IN SPITE OF TRAGEDY

Written By Joe Tennis

Like the traditional tunes collected by her grandfather, Rita Forrester carries on, always trying to “Keep On the Sunny Side.”

Even in the face of tragedy.

In December 2009, Forrester awoke to find her home in flames, barely escaping in her nightgown.

Forrester, granddaughter of musicians A.P. and Sara Carter, lost everything she had - including her husband Bob, who perished in the fire.

The tragedy still haunts Forrester, who, like her mother, marches through life in a manner that wavers between feisty and easygoing, depending on what the mood calls for.

The Family Fold

Forrester has dedicated her life to preserving the music of The Carter Family, following a calling from her mother, the late Janette Carter, who in turn had followed the wishes of her father, the late A.P. Carter, the leader of The Carter Family.

Formed in 1926, The Carter Family was discovered by a talent scout at a makeshift recording studio in Bristol, Tenn., in the summer of 1927. The trio, including June Carter’s mother, Maybelle, soared into early country music history on the strength of songs like “Wildwood Flower” and “Wabash Cannonball.”

The original act lasted more than 15 years. Subsequent groupings include Janette Carter and her brother Joe, a carpenter who helped build The Carter Fold, a music barn in Scott County, Va., now dedicated to preserving old-time mountain music.

With only a few exceptions, the music of the Saturday night shows at The Carter Fold remains acoustic. Often fast-paced, the music is most popular when Carter Fold patrons can get out and dance.

“I’ve been active since the music shows began back in 1974,” Forrester said. “I have served on the board of directors since 1979, and I’ve been the secretary for the board since that time. I was named the center’s executive director in January of 2004, and I still serve in that capacity today.”

The executive director title aside, Forrester knows what it’s like to work.

“I’ve planted flowers, mowed, weed-eated, cleaned, cooked for multitudes,” she said. “I cook until very late Friday night - often into the early morning hours. Setting up the kitchen begins by 9 a.m. Saturdays, and I’m often at the Fold until midnight or later.”

Out of the Ashes

The December fire ripped Forrester’s heart out.

“As you can imagine, the fire is quite painful for me to dwell on or discuss,” Forrester said. “We know that it began in the living room from an open flame and that the gas logs and ceiling fan operating at the time caused the flames to spread very quickly. Beyond that, I don’t know. It’s a chapter I’d very much like to close. The emotional scars from it will never completely heal.”

Almost immediately, a relief fund was set up to help Forrester and her two sons.

“The public’s outpouring of support and affection has been overwhelming and very uplifting,” Forrester said. “We’ve received gifts and notes from many foreign countries and all over the United States. The majority of those who have given and done the most have been relative strangers.”

Family members and friends also helped watch over Forrester.

“It’s been a very humbling and life-changing experience,” Forrester said. “The things that used to mean so much to me mean relatively nothing now. My priorities have been shifted. I’ve learned that we shouldn’t take one minute of life for granted and that without the Lord we really have nothing at all - something I’ve always known but the tragedy reinforced with crystal clarity.”

Moving on, Forrester works to make the Carter Fold a joyous place on Saturday nights and in early August, when it’s time for the Carter Family Memorial Festival.

This year, she welcomed living legend Ralph Stanley of nearby Dickenson County, Va., to the stage, who was joined by long-time Carter Family friend Ronnie Williams, and a family member, Lorrie Carter Bennett, a granddaughter of Maybelle Carter.

“[Stanley] and his brother, Carter, started out in much the same way The Carter Family did - they grew up in a poor family in the Appalachian Mountains,” Forrester said.

“For the Stanleys and the Carters to accomplish what they did in the music world is nothing short of phenomenal.”

Want to Go?

The Carter Fold is located along State Route 614 (A.P. Carter Highway) near Hiltons, Va., about four miles from U.S. Hwy. 58. Saturday night shows start at 7:30 p.m. Call (276) 386-6054. Visit CarterFamilyFold.org

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Hints of Autumn on Falls Branch Trail

By Lesley Eaton

In the left hand corner of a small parking lot off the side of a curvy mountain highway sits a trailhead, an entrance into another world of sorts. A few feet after stepping off the pavement and onto the trail, I close my eyes to thoroughly take in my new surroundings. Fresh air and scents both distinct and familiar, yet intangible; it is the smell of the woods.

I feel the cool respite of the canopy of leaves filtering the light. I hear the stillness surrounding me, along with a rustling of leaves being pushed around by two dog snouts, taking in that woody scent.

With my dogs and my husband, I set out to explore Falls Branch Trail, a short hike to an 80-foot cascade. The first half of the trail is a nice easy stroll through one of the few areas of virgin forest remaining in the Tellico District of Cherokee National Forest.

Bearing left, Falls Branch Trail winds through hardwood forest filled with rhododendron and goes along Sassafras Ridge. Midway, the trail quickly narrows and we begin to climb and then descend the steep pathway deeper into the forest. Making my way down the steep incline, I observe it must be much easier to manage balanced on four legs as my furry friends race ahead.

As the trail rolls up and down deeper into the woods, our surroundings become more and more enchanted, with bright green ferns lining our path and thick beautiful moss enveloping the rocks and wood all around us. It is as if the fern leaves and the moss are gradually preparing us for the pinnacle of our hike, the majestic waterfall.

We cross over the creek once. The next time we happen upon the water we are rewarded with a spectacular panoramic view of the falls. From here, we follow the path through a narrow tunnel between two large boulders and begin our climb through the stream, over and around the slippery rocks, until we feel the mist of the falls on our faces.

On this quiet Sunday afternoon, it seems as though we have our very own private waterfall.

Falls Branch is an enchanted spot, where vibrant rainbows frequent under the streaming water sparkling in the leaf filtered light. Here, one could sit and reflect, or empty their minds of all the clutter and rest peacefully with an all-natural sound machine running in the background, or take an earth shower, or join four-legged friends and simply run and explore every crevice—whatever your preference may be.

After sitting on the rocks and playing in the creek for a while, we begin the short hike back to the trailhead. The climb back is very steep, and though short it is much more strenuous than we expect.

The dogs enjoy running ahead and back to us as we slowly climb the trail through the trees. We welcome the flat easy first half of the trail, which provides a nice cool down before hopping back into the car.

As we approach the parking lot, we notice a small grouping of orange leaves in the midst of green. Tails wagging, we happily start to anticipate the chance to experience the smell of the woods again this autumn.

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Biking the Highlands—Western NC To Get New Mountain Biking Trail

By Megan Naylor

Mountain bikers in northwestern North Carolina have a new reason to rejoice the love of their sport.

The Tourism Development Authority of Watauga County, N.C. announced the purchase of a 45-acre parcel adjacent to the county’s former landfill for Rocky Knob Park, with the intention of constructing 10 to 12 miles of mountain biking, hiking and cross country skiing trails.

The purchase compliments the county’s current 130-acre tract, forming a 175-acre outdoor recreation center.

Preliminary planning and groundbreaking have begun thanks to a joint effort between the Watauga County Tourism board, Boone area bike shops Magic Cycles and Boone Bike and Touring and newly formed Boone Area Cyclists Club (BAC), which focuses on coordinating and promoting safe and accessible cycling in the area.

“It’s been well documented that this is important for tourism, but this is also great for the locals. There are no mountain bike opportunities close to town,” said BAC founder Paul Stahlschmidt. “So, with Rocky Knob Park, those of us who live in Boone will now have a great place to ride that we don’t need to drive to.”

In addition to the trails, the center will include picnic tables, a restroom area, an information kiosk and green space.

Trails will be designed as a multi-purpose, stacked loop, increasing in difficulty with each additional loop. The trails will accommodate all levels of cyclists, from beginner to advanced downhill.

The first part of the planned trail series will be approximately 1.5 to 2.5 miles and is scheduled to be ready this fall.

Stahlschmidt views Rocky Knob as a stepping stone towards establishing Watauga County, and the town of Boone, as a biking mecca for northwestern North Carolina.

“I hope more people here see cycling as a way to live healthier and happier,” he said. “With our overall sedentary lifestyles and obesity and other health problems grabbing headlines, bikes really do help. It’s an easy way to be active and enjoy the mountains.”

For more information, visit booneareawoods.com and track the trail building progress at rockyknob.wordpress.com.
Bouldering is a sport of strength, power and dynamics focusing on pure contact with the rock, free from harnesses, ropes and racks of gear. It brings both climber and rock together in a rhythmic balance of fluid grace and technical moves.

What began as a niche sport is now becoming increasingly popular, with people drawn to the technical challenge of traversing rock uninhibitedly and to the sport’s low start up cost on gear.

**Bouldering Issues and Impacts**

As more people seek out the beautiful strong rock scattered across the Appalachian Mountains, stewardship of the land becomes more of a concern.

“Areas that see a lot of people can quickly show signs of wear,” Amy Ansari said, Grassroots Organizer for The Access Fund. “People may not notice right away but often the vegetation struggles to grow back.”

Because many bouldering areas in the Southeast are located on private property or accessed by it, friction often occurs between climbers and landowners regarding issues such as trespassing, parking, litter and noise.

Environmental damage can ensue from lack of knowledge concerning the footprint inflicted on heavily trafficked areas.

Erosion, loss of vegetation, habitat loss and introduction of invasive species often occurs at trails leading between rock faces and at crash pad areas where spotters facilitate safe landings should climbers fall.

**Solutions through Stewardship**

Organizations such as The Access Fund and local climbers coalitions are working to mitigate environmental damage and establish cooperation between landowners and individual climbers.

The Access Fund, a national climber’s advocacy organization founded in 1990, focuses on keeping U.S. climbing areas open while also providing guidance to climbers, climbing organizations and landowners on management strategies. Nationally, they lobby legislature toward mutually agreeable policies concerning the sport.

“We work to educate federal agencies on what climbing is and why it is important to create policies that balance recreation and conservation, while also working with climbers and organizations on how to work proactively with landowners,” Ansari said.

Climbing coalitions also exist across the nation to promote stewardship and access on a smaller scale.

According to Anthony Love, president of the Carolina Climbers Coalition, the best way to address private property and liability issues is by being informed of whose land you are on and to ask for public access permission with the help of the local climbing organization.

“Many landowners are worried about liability,” Love said. “But in North Carolina and many states, private landowners who open their land for public recreation use are protected from liability of those recreating on their land by recreational user statutes.”

Misty Mountain Threadworks, an internationally known climbing company based in Boone, N.C., also shares the view that climbing is about more than getting restoration, erosion control and invasive weed removal.

According to Ansari, these events are aimed at highlighting climber conservation at the local level, demonstrating to landowners and land managers that climbers care about the places they recreate.

Local coalitions across the country team up and choose boulder-fields and other climbing areas that deserve a little extra love.

“Whenever you can, try to carpool and when bouldering, try to minimize your footprint by minimizing trash generated,” said Love. “Please be sensitive to vegetation and trees and avoid climbing in large groups as it concentrates the impact to immediate areas.”

Across the board, the resounding response to the question of how climbers can preserve boulders and routes they are passionate about is by being responsible for their own individual impact.

“We shouldn’t leave things the way we found them, we should leave them better then when we arrive,” said Kearse.

For more information on bouldering stewardship and how to get involved visit AccessFund.org or CarolinaClimbers.org.
Old Dominion Postpones Seeking Air Permits for Proposed VA Power Plant

By Sandra Diaz

Wise Energy for Virginia coalition, a coalition of several environmental organizations whose mission is help secure a clean energy future for Virginia, has recently seen progress in their campaign to stop construction of a new coal-fired power plant in the Hampton Roads area proposed by Old Dominion Electric Co-op (ODEC).

ODEC recently announced plans to postpone pursuance of air pollution permits for up to two years. The coalition has been working to encourage ODEC to consider investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy over building the plant.

The coalition has long opposed the 1500 megawatt plant which, if built, would be the largest in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Among the coalition’s concerns are the resulting air pollution, water pollution from mercury, the use of mountaintop removal coal and the plant’s contribution to climate change.

“The degree of citizen opposition to the plant is clearly more than ODEC bargained for. When the Surry County Planning Commission took this up, over 200 people showed up and the great majority of speakers opposed the plant. This gives ODEC a sense of what to expect if it pursues state and federal permits and they can already see the opposition building in the greater Hampton Roads area and among their retail co-ops’ ratepayers,” said Tom Commons, Virginia Director for Appalachian Voices, part of the coalition working to stop the plant.

However, the company is still working to advance the plant at the local level and is seeking water pollution permits from the Army Corps of Engineers, which requires a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement. The coalition is petitioning the Army Corps to critically evaluate ODEC’s proposed need for the plant and independently evaluate environmentally preferable alternatives to the proposal. Learn more at www.WiseEnergyforVa.org.

EPA Stops Fast Track Permitting for Mountaintop Removal

On June 17, the Army Corps of Engineers announced suspension of the Nationwide Permit 21 program effective immediately in Appalachia states from Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. NWP 21 allowed for the “fast-tracking” of Clean Water Act permits of valley fills permits for surface coal mining activities.

Permits will now be individually reviewed under more rigorous standards and subject to public comment.

In response to this decision and other recent actions by the Environmental Protection Agency to clamp down on the impacts of mountaintop removal mining, the National Mining Association filed a lawsuit against the EPA in July.

4th Circuit Court Overturns NC’s Emissions Lawsuit Against TVA

By Jed Grubbs

On July 26, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., unanimously voted to overturn a North Carolina judge’s ruling requiring the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to improve emission controls at four coal-fired power plants. U.S. District Judge Lacy H. Thornburg, of Asheville had previously determined the plants were having a deleterious effect on air quality in Western North Carolina.

TVA, which was created in 1933, is the nation’s largest public utility, servicing most of Tennessee as well as portions of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia and Indiana.

A health expert who appeared during the original lawsuit testified that if targeted emissions controls were implemented there would be 99 fewer premature deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, 19,000 fewer asthma attacks, 2,300 fewer lost school days, 60 fewer hospital admissions, and 55 fewer emergency room visits related to asthma in North Carolina alone.

A TVA health expert, meanwhile, called the impact of the utility’s emissions on North Carolina “almost imperceptible.”

Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson, III, of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court wrote that allowing Judge Thornburg’s ruling to stand would have undermined the nation’s carefully crafted regulatory scheme.

Moving forward, North Carolina may appeal the July decision to the U.S. Supreme Court or seek a re-hearing before the full appeals court.

THE COAL TRUTH - Notes from all over

POWERING DOWN: American Electric Power, one of the nation’s largest power generators, will idle 10 of its smaller coal-fired power plants due to slow demand. The plants, located in Ohio, Virginia, Indiana and West Virginia, will be pulled back online as needed during peak demand months of January, July and August.

SUBSIDIZED: A draft study from the International Energy Agency revealed that the fossil-fuel industry receives $550 billion a year in global subsidies, about 75 percent more than previously thought.

APPLES TO PEACHES: Responding to pressure from lawmakers and environmentalists, electricity giant Duke Energy is conducting price comparisons of Appalachian coal from mountaintop removal to other sources of coal. Duke energy is required by state laws to provide the cheapest possible electricity. In a report released earlier this year, Duke said “Our goal, as always, is to strike the right balance between economic, environmental and social considerations.”

DOCTOR KNOWS BEST: The 62,000-strong American Medical Student Association has formally adopted an amendment opposing the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining as well as the continued reliance on electricity from coal. The AMSA membership includes pre-med and medical students, interns, residents and practicing physicians from across the country.

ALL RISE: A trial date of March 14, 2011 has been set in a coal dust lawsuit filed by Williamson attorney Kevin Thompson against Massey Energy and three of its subsidiaries. The suit claims that hundreds of children were exposed to coal dust from a processing plant next to Marsh Fork Elementary School.

SWOOSH!: Sports giant Nike withdrew an promotional ad campaign for a new West Virginia University uniform when it met with strong disapproval over the image depicting a football stadium that resembled a moun-
Wild and Wonderful: Gauley Fest Raises Awareness About River Protection

By Maureen Halsema

Twenty-five miles of wild river featuring Class V whitewater rapids and breathtaking views of the gorge lures adventure seekers and nature lovers from far and wide to West Virginia’s Gauley River.

“Guaranteed flows, cool clear water, amazing variety of rapids, play spots and almost every type of craft you can imagine,” said Brian Jennings, general manager of North American River Runners. “The Gauley is a whitewater melting pot, not something you see on many other rivers.”

In honor of this famed river, American Whitewater, a nonprofit organization focused on conservation and restoration of recreational whitewater resources, founded Gauley Fest in 1983, to celebrate the cessation of a hydroelectric project that would have dewatered the river.

This year, Gauley Fest will be held September 17 to 19 in Summersville, W.Va. The largest whitewater festival in the world, Gauley Fest is an annual fundraising event featuring live entertainment, vendors, auctions, paddling and partying. The festival’s proceeds contribute to American Whitewater’s conservation and access projects across the nation.

“Gauley Fest helps raise money to fund river restoration projects that American Whitewater spearheads, particularly with hydroelectric dam projects,” said Mark Singleton, executive director of American Whitewater. “Whenever there is a license renewal, we typically weigh in.”

Downstream from the epic white water run, the river faces a new threat: mountaintop mining.

In a study by American Rivers, an environmental conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring rivers, the Gauley River was listed as this year’s third most endangered river in the country.

EPA Solicits Comments On Coal Ash

By Kara Dodson and Parker Stevens

The EPA has proposed two options for regulating coal ash, and a public comment period is open until Sept. 21.

The first option, known as Subtitle C, would classify coal ash a “special waste;” this standard requires ash disposal sites to be lined, slurry ponds to be phased out and a strong national standard for waste disposal.

The second option, Subtitle D, would classify coal ash as a solid waste, and replace federally enforced standards with state guidelines.

Coal ash contains heavy metals including arsenic, mercury, lead and selenium. Hundreds of unlined ash disposal ponds store millions of tons of this hazardous waste across the U.S.

Reports from the Upper Watauga Riverkeeper, Earth Justice and Environmental Integrity Project among other organizations have documented contaminated groundwater and residential wells, polluted public waterways and structurally unsound operations.

Until recently, the EPA partnered with the coal industry to promote the re-use of coal ash, using it in an array of consumer, agricultural and commercial products. The partnership, called the Coal Combustion Products Partnership (C2P2), was suspended in late spring and the web pages removed from the EPA website while the agency re-evaluates the beneficial uses of coal combustion residues.

Currently, the Army Corps of Engineers is considering using coal ash to seal at least 11 levees along the Mississippi River. The levees, built between the 1930s and 1950s, are weakened and in need of reinforcement. When mixed with lime, coal ash forms a cement-like material that can be injected into the levees, though the possible effects on water quality have not been studied.

For over a decade, coal ash has been used to strengthen levees along the river near Memphis, Tenn. The Army Corps admits to being unaware of any testing to determine if toxic metals have leached into the water. If the EPA does classify coal ash as hazardous material, the Army Corps will reconsider its proposal.

During the public comment period, the EPA held five public hearings concerning the proposed regulation, including ones in Arlington, Va., on Aug. 30, and Charlotte, N.C., on Sept. 14.

Visit AppVoices.org/Coal-Ash to read more about the hearings and comment period.
“Appalachia Rising” To Rise Up in D.C.

By Jillian Randel

A weekend of mobilizing will take place in Washington D.C., September 25-27, designed to help citizens learn what they can do to help end mountaintop removal coal mining.

The Voices of the Mountains Conference, scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, will feature workshops and panel discussions about Appalachia, civil disobedience, and the issues surrounding the destruction of waterways, mountains and communities as a result of the controversial mining practice.

The event will culminate on Monday, the 28th, with an Appalachia Rising Day of Action. There will also be a National Lobby day on Tuesday the 29th.

Event coordinators hope to draw policymakers, coalfield residents, miners and other citizens to the event.

Visit appalachiarising.org for more information or to sign up.

More Logging for Daniel Boone Forest

By Jillian Randel

The U.S. Forest Service has announced plans to log 365 acres in the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky. The proposed area is part of a forest that has just begun to reach maturity, with half of the trees aged 70 years or older. The forest also includes numerous springs, several species of orchids and a variety of flora. The forest service has also proposed constructing temporary roads and using herbicides to kill unwanted native trees and invasive species.

The area in question previously experienced substantial quarrying and logging and is the site of significant clearcutting by the Forest Service about 20 years ago.

For more info, visit kyheartwood.org or email kentuckyheartwood@gmail.com.

The Little Wonders Project: Biking for Bikers

McKeever will be joined by Josh McCauley, Ben Rollins and at least four others. Members of the crew have sold their cars and belongings in order to buy an old school bus, which they have converted to run on used vegetable oil.

The trip began in Charleston, S.C., and will end in San Francisco, Calif. Along the way, they will be working on organic farms and hosting bike safety events for children and adults.

The team will also be raising money for the Garret Wonders Memorial Fund, a nonprofit that provides cycling scholarships for students at the University of Ohio.

To learn more about the trip and how to get involved, visit TheLittleWondersProject.com.

Solar Now Cheaper Than Nuclear in North Carolina

A report from Dr. John Blackburn, Duke University’s former chancellor and economics department emeritus chair, found that in an “apples-to-apples” comparison in the state of North Carolina, solar electricity can be produced for 14 cents per kilowatt-hour, while the same electricity produced by nuclear power plants would cost between 14 - 18 cents per kilowatt-hour. Read the report in its entirety at ncwarn.org/?p=2290.

Coughing up Kudzu

According to atmospheric scientists at Harvard University, kudzu—the tenaciously invasive species spreading across the southeast—is a major contributor to ozone pollution.

As kudzu releases isoprene and nitric oxide, these chemicals combine with nitrogen in the air and form the greenhouse gas. Ozone formation close to the earth’s surface is extremely hazardous to human health and the growth of many plants, threatening both air quality and agricultural production.

With a growth rate about three times as fast as trees and other vegetation, kudzu is exceedingly difficult to control. Some measures being used to control the vine include livestock grazing, burning, mowing and herbicides.

Cooking Up Solutions

Appalachian Alternative Agriculture, a nonprofit group based in the town of Anville in Jackson County, Ky., recently opened their kitchen doors to regional farmers.

The newly completed processing kitchen, which has been 8 years in the making, was designed to have a high output capacity. It will provide local farmers an opportunity to increase the market value of their produce by allowing them to sell their goods on a retail basis.

“It will serve as an incubator type facility for farmers and entrepreneurs that have a product they would like to produce and market,” Agriculture Natural Resource Agent Jeff Henderson said.

The cost for using the processing facility will be minimal so that small farms can afford to participate and have the chance to use industrial sized equipment.

In addition to the kitchen itself, there will be a docking station for Kentucky State University’s mobile chicken processing unit and a pavilion where farmers market days will be held.

East Kentucky Power Cooperative donated the land for the facility, while funding was provided by a collaboration of partners.

Toxic Reports

Find out about toxic chemical releases and waste management activities in your community with the EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory, detailing toxic emissions into the environment during 2009. Click to EPA.Gov/Tri.
**Gee, Haw! Husky Assist Program Sleds Into Virginia**

*By Megan Naylor*

The last thing that comes to mind when thinking of Virginia is the Siberian Husky, a popular high energy, cold weather breed of dog. That is, until now.

Siberian Husky Assist, a safe haven relief program started in 2003 and based in Bristol, Va., educates the public about the unique breed and rescues neglected Siberian Huskies across the South.

The program rescues dogs from shelters and homes that cannot support them and places them into safe foster homes until they can find permanent relocations.

Their coverage area for rescues ranges from Roanoke, Va. to Knoxville, Tenn.

According to Marcia Horne, president of Siberian Husky Assist, the goal of the program is to find the dogs loving “forever homes.”

Horne first got involved with Siberian huskies when she was searching for a good therapy dog.

“I adopted a husky from the Blountville, Tenn., shelter to be used as a therapy dog and wondered why these dogs were in shelters,” “so, I set up a rescue with the guidance of Sidney Sachs of sled dog rescue in Spring City, Tenn.,” Horne said.

Since that day, she has worked diligently to give abandoned huskies a second chance by facilitating rescues, fosters and adoptions while juggling a barrage of daily calls and emails about dogs in need of placement.

“It takes us weeks to months to find a good home for our huskies,” Horne said.

Currently, Siberian Husky Assist lacks the land and funds needed to help a large number of dogs.

“This is why I’m driven to set up a sanctuary and dog sledding facility,” Horne said. “We and our dogs work to earn our fundraising dollars.”

In addition to acting as a facilitator for husky halfway houses (foster homes), the organization has its own sled dog team, which participates in demonstrations and fundraising events.

They also teach dog sled training sessions for beginner and intermediate mushers, offering the public a taste of what Siberian huskies have been trained to do for thousands of years.

They encourage owners to bring their own dogs to the classes with the understanding that they must be up to date on all shots and friendly with humans and other canines.

Husky Assist plans to open the South’s first ever Husky Sanctuary and Dog Sledding Facility, located at the Blue Heron Resort in Saltville, Va., as soon as funds are available to begin building.

The new facility will provide opportunities for further outreach, education and fundraising and serve as an area for dogs to stay when foster homes are in short supply.

The facility will include a Siberian Husky, Northern Breed and Handicapped sanctuary as well as an educational facility for dog sledding classes and outreach.

Horne believes that public outreach and education on Siberian Huskies is essential in finding a good fit for long-term adoption.

“Our goal is to find these special rescued Siberians a home where we feel there is a match made in the characteristics of the dog and the family that adopts them, to ensure they will be there forever.”

To get involved, visit SiberianHuskyAssist.com.

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**Tennessee Wild Dedicated to Wilderness**

*By Ray Zimmerman*

On June 8, U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) sponsored and introduced the Tennessee Wilderness Act, cosponsored by the Senator Bob Corker (R-TN). If adopted, the act will add 20,000 acres to the designated wilderness areas in Cherokee National Forest.

According to Jeff Hunter, director of the coalition Tennessee Wild, the act will protect sensitive wilderness areas that would otherwise be available for timber harvest, mining, oil and gas development and road building.

Hunter calls this proposal “a window of opportunity to permanently protect these beautiful areas for their significant recreational value and for the ecosystem services these areas provide."

Tennessee Wild has worked to expand the wilderness designation for Big Frog, Little Frog, Joyce Kilmer Slickrock, Big Laurel Branch and Sampson Mountain Wilderness areas.

According to Hunter, the “gem” of this proposal is the Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area. “It’s a virtually intact watershed with beauty rivaling just about anything you can find in the Smokies,” he said.

Eight conservation groups have joined with Tennessee Wild, including the Wilderness Society, the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club, Campaign for America’s Wilderness (part of the Pew Environmental Group), Cherokee Forest Voices, Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning, Smoky Mountains Hiking Club, and the Southern Environmental Law Center. These groups encourage citizens to write their representatives in Congress to support the Tennessee Wilderness Act.

Hunter extended an invitation to individuals who want to help more.

“Come hike or maintain a trail with us,” Hunter said. “We lead regular outings to the Cherokee. Seeing these places is the best way to understand why Tennessee Wild exists.”

All trail maintenance is done with hand tools; no chain saws are permitted.

Visit TNWild.org to find a list of their upcoming events.

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**Crazy Quilt Project Still Accepting Patches**

Floating Lab Collective is still accepting patches for their crazy quilt project designed to document local artists’ responses to mountaintop removal. Simply create a patch of any size or shape and dedicate it to a mountain you love. Include the name of the honored mountain somewhere on the fabric and a written description of a personal memory with the mountain.

Patches will be accepted through Spring 2011 and can be mailed to Kate Clark 5308 39th St. NW Washington, D.C., 20015.
Econo-vironment

Communities across Appalachia strive to ensure the economic and environmental health of their region by launching innovative programs focused on long-term solutions.

Stories by Julie Johnson

perhaps the economic solution for the region itself, may come in recognizing the huge potential for sustainable, community-centered development in the region.

Historically, the residents of Appalachia have faced chronic unemployment, severe poverty, substandard housing, inadequate schools, and severe health care for many generations,” said Richard Goebel in an April 2010 U.S. Senate hearing on Appalachian Culture and Veterans.

“Despite these many challenges, they have survived and in some situations flourished. Resilience is a major component of their constitution. Their environment has often required their skills at universities and avoiding the job market for at least four years. Some can turn to various government programs, applying for small business loans and assistance through the Veterans Affairs programs.

But the long-term employment solution is for both soldier and civilian Appalachia, and perhaps the economic solution for the region itself, may come in recognizing the huge potential for sustainable, community-centered development in the region.

Finding Ways Forward

Appalachian Transition Initiative Seeks Strategies for a Sustainable Future

Two Kentucky non-profit organizations are collaborating with the Appalachian Transition Initiative, Kentucky for the Commonwealth (KFTC) and Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) conceived the project as a means of addressing economic disparity in Central Appalachia.

According to their website, “we stand divided in our communities, and are subject to broader economic forces that seek our resources—including the coal under our feet—at the cheapest price possible. It’s time for transition, and to get ready we need a real and honest conversation about our future.”

The Transition Initiative seeks to generate and expand this conversation through collaborative projects with community members, non-profit organizations, and entrepreneurs in Appalachia. Recently, members of the Initiative worked with the Central Appalachian Prosperity Project to complete the Essays Project, 24 white papers that detailed various approaches to transition within the region.

The Transition Initiative’s website, found at appalachiantransition.org, offers a comprehensive list of “ways forward,” ranging from meeting the needs of the community to market with as little overhead cost as possible. “We believe if we can grow, harvest, process and market it locally we will all be healthier and wealthier,” said Scarboro.

Sunny Skies for West Virginia JOBS

By Derek Speranza

One standout among these projects is the JOBS project, a renewable energy initiative that creates local jobs in Central Appalachia by developing and installing renewable energy systems.

One focus of the JOBS project is the installation of solar panels in West Virginia. Partnering with Mountainview Solar & Energy, the JOBS project made its pilot installation on a Williamson, Va., home just months ago, and the project was even covered by the BBC. “We cannot generate enough energy to fuel our current appetite,” says Jerry Hudson of the JOBS project, “so the town of Williamson is interested in employing energy efficiency technologies and promoting conservation.”

Together, the JOBS project and the town of Williamson are leading the way in new technologies. The JOBS project is currently preparing for a community event in the Fall surrounding the solar installations, so stay tuned.

Visit jobs-project.org for more information.

Cooking up Small Business Opportunities

Coal River Valley’s Community Food Kitchen

The September residents of West Virginia’s Coal River Valley will find a newly opened community kitchen and small business incubator ready to serve the Boone-Raleigh area.

Residents of the area planned, financed and built the center as a neighborhood community kitchen and crafts center learning center and small business training center. The goal is for any community member that wishes to be able to get their product from harvest to market with as little overhead cost as possible. “We believe if we can grow, harvest, process and market it locally we will all be healthier and wealthier,” says Scarboro.

Skill-sharing and traditional craft workshops will also be held at the center. These workshops will focus on inspiring local craftpeople to pass down the knowledge of Appalachia’s unique traditions to younger generations.

“This is about empowering the people who are rooted in the community, who have lost hope and feel as though their voice is not heard,” says Scarboro. The Community Food Kitchen is located at 30307 Coal River Road in Whitetop, Va.

Finding Ways Forward

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The Transition Initiative’s website, found at appalachiantransi-

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Pictured above, The JOBS project brought Southern West Virginia officials, contractors, electricians and interested community members together to learn the details of solar photovoltaics. Photo courtesy of The Jobs Project
A Cooperative Approach to Renewing East Kentucky

by Sara Pennington and Randy Wilson

In this article, excerpted from the July-August 2010 issue of Solutions Journal, the authors propose strengthening the Appalachian Power Coop to create innovative programs to invest in energy efficiency, workforce development, and increased renewable energy generation. Read the full version at thesolutionsjournal.com.

Central Appalachia has much to recommend it. It contains one of the most biologically diverse forests in the world and breathtaking mountains that have inspired writers and artists for centuries. These same mountains have helped to shape the people who call this region home. Appalachian people are proud of their heritage, of the culture that has developed in these mountains, and of the beauty of the landscape that surrounds them.

The people of Appalachia are also faced with more than their share of daunting problems—the byproducts of a century of over-dependence on a coal extraction economy, including persistent poverty, joblessness, poor health, extensive poor-quality and inefficient housing stock, a damaged natural environment with diminishing air and water quality, and a dangerous vulnerability to injury and is a finite resource.

The co-ops are locally owned and, according to their publications and messages, democratically controlled by their membership. Though much work is still needed, Wise County is currently bringing co-ops into complete adherence to this democratic structure, the members, as owners of the cooperative, collectively will own the solution itself.

Unlike other fee-for-profit, investor-owned utilities, the programs will return to the cooperative members in the form of capital credits and re-enter the local economy. North Fork Powell River Watershed.

Authoritative and their 16 distribution cooperatives launch an aggressive, well-funded, five-year energy efficiency and renewable energy initiative—called “Renew East Kentucky”—in the EKPC service area.

This initiative, anchored by the distribution cooperatives, would re-tool and expand the local workforce, build up local initiatives already in place, and much more aggressively implement energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions to address the region’s significant infrastructure and economic challenges.

The initiative would be operating in Appalachian Kentucky much longer. He doesn’t believe the industry slogan, “Coal Is Our Future.” He says that coal production “is already declining and will continue to decline in the future.”

With a clear view of the problems and the landscape, eastern Kentuckians can design solutions that offer tangible alternatives and provide real jobs and hope for a future beyond coal. They can design solutions that help initiate whole new sectors of the local economy, including persistent poverty, joblessness, poor health, extensive poor-quality and inefficient housing stock, a damaged natural environment with diminishing air and water quality, and a dangerous vulnerability to injury and is a finite resource.

He says that coal production “is already declining and will continue to decline in the future.”

Appalachian Kentucky is challenged by many daunting, and overlapping economic problems. Appalachian Kentucky is challenged by many daunting, and overlapping economic problems. Appalachian Kentucky is challenged by many daunting, and overlapping economic problems.

In Wise County, Virginia, recovery and reinvestment are welcome words. One in five people in the county are living in poverty, unemployment is up 2.4 percent from 2008, and people are fleeing from drug overtures at the highest rates of anywhere in the state of Virginia.

But the numbers are not all grim. Wise County is currently bringing co-ops into complete adherence to this democratic structure, the members, as owners of the cooperative, collectively will own the solution itself.

Econo-vironment

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Wise Spending in Virginia
County puts stimulus toward green jobs
By Sarah Vig
In Wise County, Virginia, recovery and reinvestment are welcome words. One in five people in the county are living in poverty, unemployment is up 2.4 percent from 2008, and fatal drug overdose rates are the highest in the state of Virginia.

But the numbers are not all grim. Wise County is currently the recipient of $128,246,825 in recovery funding from the economic stimulus package, formally the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, that Congress passed in early 2009. Per capita, Wise Co. is receiving $3,075, nearly triple the national average per capita rate of $1,170.

In a region historically dominated economically by coal mining, the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy is designing $86 million for investments in renewable energy installations and energy efficiency projects, with more than $9.5 million targeted specifically at small localities in the county.

“I am pleased that funding is being directed to areas of the Commonwealth hit hardest by the economic downturn,” said Virginia senator Jim Webb. His fellow senator Mark Warner said, “This grant will create jobs and improve the rural infrastructure even as we provide clean drinking water to hundreds of families.”

A portion of the stimulus funding will provide $2 million for improving water infrastructure county-wide. Over $850,000 will facilitate drinking water improvement in the town of Appalachia.

Another $50,000 is allocated for “assistance in the development of detailed designs, drawings, plans and specifications for the implementation of remediation measures to address water quality impacts associated with abandoned mine sites in the North Fork Powell River Watershed.”

Funding throughout the rest of Appalachia varied widely from county to county, with some receiving funds comparable to the average and other counties like Logan in West Virginia receiving barely a third of the national average. Visit projects.propublica.org/recovery for an interactive recovery funds tracker.

A Cooperative Approach to Renewing East Kentucky

Central Appalachia has much to recommend it. It contains one of the most biologically diverse forests in the world and breathtaking mountains that have inspired artists and writers for centuries. These same mountains have helped to shape the people who call this region home.

The people of Appalachia are also faced with more than their share of daunting problems—the byproducts of a century of over-dependence on a coal extraction economy, including persistent poverty, joblessness, poor health, extensive poor-quality and inefficient housing stock, a damaged natural environment with diminishing air and water quality, and a dangerous vulnerability to the quickly rising cost of coal-generated electricity.

With a clear view of the problems and the landscape, eastern Kentuckians can design solutions that offer tangible alternatives and provide real jobs and hope for a future beyond coal.

We propose that the East Kentucky Power Cooperative and their 16 distribution cooperatives launch an aggressive, well-funded, five-year energy efficiency and renewable energy initiative—called “Renew East Kentucky”—in the EKPC service area.

This initiative, anchored by the distribution cooperatives, would retool and expand the local workforce, build up local initiatives already in place, and much more aggressively implement energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions to address the region’s significant infrastructure and economic challenges.

The initiative would offset the need for a risky new coal plant that EKPC is proposing to build and in its stead would yield thousands of new jobs during the initiative’s initial five-year lifespan. It would reduce energy consumption while diversifying energy generation, facilitate new job training, upgrade residential housing, build new renewable energy facilities and sustainable and prosperous future in Central Appalachia,” according to the site. “But there are a wide variety of efforts and directions to pursue ranging from better and more sustainable utilization of our region’s diverse forestland to improvement in the quality of and access to child care for the region’s kids.”

Appalachian Transition Initiative
Continued from page 15

sustainable agriculture to education and workforce development.

The Millard Area Technology Center is featured as an example of a sustainable workforce development model. Millard offers an energy auditing and home weatherization certification program. The current students are already employed by community action agencies and local businesses, and are beginning weatherization projects in homes throughout south-eastern Kentucky.

“There is no one single idea or industry that will create a more just, healthy, vegetarian fare! Gourmet coffee, tea and espresso. Sandwiches, soups, baked goods and snacks featuring organic, local and fair trade ingredients.
Biofuels: LOCAL GIVES WAY TO LARGE SCALE

By Bill Kovarik

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Melita Kyriakou watches as a big blue fuel truck with a green biodiesel logo grinds past the fuel tanks, under the bridge and up the hill – off on another delivery to one of the four biodiesel retailers in the mountain city.

The good news, for Blue Ridge Biodiesel, is that they are still in business. The bad news is that half the staff has been laid off, and most other community-scale biodiesel plants in the state of North Carolina are going out of business.

“It’s true – I do wake up in the middle of night,” she said. “There’s too much work, too little time, and too many forces against you.”

The biggest headache was the abrupt expiration of a $1 per gallon federal tax break in December, 2009. Attempts to extend the tax break could eventually succeed in Congress, but for now, biodiesel is quite a bit more expensive than regular diesel.

“Politicians are constantly talking about getting the country free of foreign oil,” Kyriakou said. “Yet here is one industry functioning, viable, directly plugged into the existing infrastructure—and it just had its legs cut out from under it.”

Before the end of the tax credit, the biodiesel industry employed an estimated 53,000 people, according to the National BioDiesel Board. No figures are available for the number of jobs lost so far.

“We just want a level playing field,” she said. “Local foods make sense—why not local fuel?”

Norman Smit of the Biofuels Center of North Carolina, says there is a place for small scale biodiesel. “There certainly is value in being able to convert (waste) into a commodity that can help school buses go,” he said. “The problem is that there isn’t enough of it, it isn’t particularly cheap to produce, and it can’t scale up.”

Replacing large amounts of petroleum is going to take large scale regional planning, he said.

Local fuel losing ground

Thirty years ago, in the wake of the Arab oil embargoes, the wildly popular idea was that farm and community scale efforts should replace foreign oil. Americans would band together, throw off the yoke of petroleum, and create healthy, sustainable jobs in their communities.

Thousands of small scale ethanol and biodiesel plants sprung up, including at least a dozen in the Appalachian region. Ribbon-cuttings and station openings provided regular fare for TV and newspapers, and communities took pride in reclaiming transport fuel technology and putting it under local control.

As late as 2002, most Midwestern corn ethanol plants were locally owned, and economic benefits spread through the communities, according to the Institute for Local Self Reliance (ILSR). But in recent years, a dramatic shift from small locally owned plants serving local markets to large plants serving distant markets has occurred.

“Thus, the close relationship between community and manufacturing facility was severed and the percentage of the dollar that stayed in the local community dropped significantly,” ILSR said in its 2008 Rural Power Study. The study recommended re-orienting policy to favor local and rural renewable energy projects.

“From a technological perspective, larger may seem more profitable, but from a community perspective, smaller may be more profitable,” the study authors said. “As it turns out, the benefits of building big are small, while the benefits of building small are quite large.”

It’s ironic that state and federal policies often do just the opposite. Willis, Va., resident Sam Bolt discovered this in 2007 when he sold a few thousand gallons of extra farm-brewed biodiesel. Bolt was charged with tax evasion and given a one year suspended jail sentence. Although many were sympathetic, no one in government asked how they could help.

Region focuses on non-food crops

Only two large grain ethanol plants exist in the region. A Loudon, Tenn., plant built mostly for the corn sweeteners market in the 1970s produces 65 million gallons of corn ethanol per year along with many kinds of feed products from the leftover corn. Completed this year, Clean Burn Fuels, of Raeford, N.C., is producing about 60 million gallons of ethanol a year and delivering a daily ration of 18,000 bushels of distillers grains to the hog industry.

Most of the regional scale-up and commercialization of biofuels is focused on two new cellulosic ethanol fuel facilities.

In spring 2010 researchers with the University of Tennessee Biofuels Initiative planted 1,000 acres of switchgrass (top) to evaluate the plant’s potential for use in the production of cellulosic ethanol at the Genera Energy/DDCE demonstration scale biorefinery at Venore, Tenn. Photo by S. Jackson. LIITA.

Biodiesel can be made from any fat or oil. Current U.S. biodiesel production is primarily from the oil from soybeans (left) or from recycled restaurant cooking oil. Cleaner burning and renewable biodiesel is most often blended at 20% with petroleum diesel. Photo by Bob Allan, National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

- University of Tennesse at Knoxville, in partnership with Dupont Danisco and Genera Energy, will produce nearly 250,000 gallons of ethanol from an enzymatic process at a Biomass Innovation Park. Over 6,000 acres of switchgrass have been planted under contract with farmers in the region.
- Range Fuels in Soperton, Ga., is using waste wood from the paper industry to produce, at full capacity, up to 100 million gallons of ethanol and methanol a year. The wood is gasified and then converted to liquid fuels by a catalyst.
- It is too early to tell how successful these efforts might be, but the resource base for biofuels from non-food sources has the potential to replace at least half of U.S. fuel consumption, according to a 2005 Oak Ridge National Labs study. Excluding grains—the second-generation cellulosic potential from perennial crops—farm and forest residues amount to over 1,200 billion tons of feedstock, which at 80 gallons per ton, would amount to just over 100 billion gallons of fuel, ORNL researchers said.

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The concept is simple—take one of the most effective photosynthetic life forms on earth and put it to work. The secret weapon: algae.

Algae are organisms that grow quickly in aquatic environments via photosynthesis, CO2 and nutrients, and they can be used to produce biomass and biofuel.

Algae have several advantages over food crop biofuels. For instance, an alga grows faster and does not necessitate the use of agricultural land. Farmers can grow algae on land otherwise considered unsuitable for crop production, expanding and diversifying their options. They could even convert algae into biodiesel and use it to fuel their equipment. Algae can actually double in size in one day while other crops may require up to an entire agricultural season to grow.

Algae do not compete with other food sources, preventing escalating food prices as a result of biofuel production. The oil content of algae is also much higher than that of corn and other food-based biofuels.

Algae production faces several technical challenges, however. In terms of commercial production, expense is the biggest obstacle. Researchers are currently exploring a variety of different methods to cost effectively grow, harvest and convert algae into biofuel. From coupling algae cultivation with wastewater cleanup to using the co-products for green fertilizers, researchers are investigating different means to minimize the production costs.

Many petroleum corporations, including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Shell have been working on algae research and development technology. Exxon Mobil projected that it would spend more than $600 million over the next decade on research and development of algae-based biofuels.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Energy recently dedicated $24 million to algal biofuel research to supplement the $140 million allocated from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

While algae production does require large volumes of water, it does not need treated drinking water; ocean water, polluted river water or treated wastewaters are viable options.

Algae can also consume the CO2 necessary for photosynthesis from power plant and industry emissions—as optimal algal growth occurs in a CO2 rich environment. By strategically placing algae farms near existing power plants, a portion of emissions can effectively be recycled into algae growth fuel for biodiesel. Algae can help carbon-neutral.

Algae absorb CO2 during their growth process and then release it when the CO2 is burnt for fuel.

“The carbon never disappears. It just changes from a greenhouse gas to a fertilizer or fuel through photosynthesis,” said Bruce Dannenberg, chief executive officer of Plantonix, a North Carolina corporation dedicated to researching and developing a commercially viable production of algal and cyanobacterial biofuels.

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Biofuels: Local Gives Way To Large Scale
Continued from page 17

Impacts of cellulose biofuel crops

Switchgrass, miscanthus and other perennial biomass crops are very much like hay crops and seem to have few environmental drawbacks. According to a 2006 USDA study, benefits include “reduced soil erosion, increased water quality, enhanced soil-carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.”

UT Knoxville researchers found that switchgrass can be left standing through most of the winter and can provide critical winter cover for wildlife.

Critics of the idea, like Timothy Searchinger of Princeton University, warn that forest and grassland will be converted to new cropland to replace the grain once grown elsewhere. Switchgrass, if grown on U.S. corn land, increases greenhouse gas emissions by 50%, he estimated.

“Searchinger’s argument ... is flat wrong,” wrote C. Boyden Gray in a February Washington Times article. “He assumes mass conversion of forest land when the opposite is the case... Forest stocks have been stable, not falling, despite increased use of corn for ethanol. There has been no net conversion of land from sustainable forests to biofuel production.”

Like other facets of the “food or fuel” and biodiversity issues surrounding biofuels, the questions often involve future impacts, which are difficult to anticipate based on the limited experience to date.

A 2007 law—the Energy and Independence Security Act—requires that ethanol and other fuels have to produce fewer overall emissions of greenhouse gases over the life cycle of the fuel’s production, transportation and use. So far, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the requirement has not proven overly difficult for the biofuels industry.

Biofuel’s future in Appalachia

The focus of research and development in the southeast has been to supply feedstock for the cellulosic ethanol industry, notes Jeremy Ferrell, Biodiesel Operations and Outreach Manager at Appalachian State University.

Yet the technology is not mature. “The promised breakthroughs in cellulosic ethanol technology, namely new lower-cost enzymes, have not yet come to fruition,” said Ferrell.

Along with large scale research into liquid fuels, small community-scaled biomass power plants (around 50MW) have proven successful, and there are many examples for the Appalachian region, Ferrell said. The McNeil Power Station in Burlington, for instance, uses waste wood, yard wastes and forest residues to create 50 MW of power while supporting a local forest industry.

ASU’s emphasis has been training, research and development for community-scale biomass technologies, such as BlueRidge Biofuels in Asheville, EnergyXChange in Burnsville, N.C., and the Jackson County Green Energy Park in Dillsboro, N.C.

Community technologies should include not only biodiesel, but also gasification, and anaerobic digestion with raw materials such as agricultural and forestry residues, municipal solid waste, landfill gas, and used cooking oils.

Replacing even a percentage of petroleum will involve both small and large projects, Smit says.

“The key thing is that biofuels need to be sustainable and we need to have a discussion about it up front.”

“If the world switches from petroleum to bio-based materials, rural land is going to become a strategic asset, and biomass is going to become a major discussion point from policy and scientific point of view.”

Pond Scum Solutions
Continued from previous page

clean up the environment and provide the fuel and electricity needed to aid the transition from fossil fuels and their damaging environmental impacts.

While many species of algae require consistent sunlight and temperatures, some scientists believe that this biofuel shows great promise in the Southern Appalachian region. The key: using natural native wild algal species that have adapted to the mountain climate over millions of years.

“What you try to do is use biomimcry, basically, what nature has provided naturally, to your advantage at growing the crop,” said Dannenberg. “You just have to have the right approach and the right strategy. Planktonix is working with Old Dominion University and we have a joint project to develop a practical, cost-competitive commercial approach to get algae and high lipid cyanobacteria adopted regionally as a new energy microcrop.”

Perhaps with some continued research and technological development, Appalachia may play a role in farming algal biofuels.

From Green & Yellow to Simply Green
By Maureen Halsema

“When you compare cost of biofuels to cost of petroleum it’s like comparing apples to oranges,” said Patrick Hatcher, executive director of the Virginia Coastal Energy Research Consortium. “The cost of petroleum is actually way under valued, because it is subsidized by the government and by the users. For example, one thing not incorporated into conventional fossil fuels, is the cost of abatement of the pollution. Look at the gulf crisis. Is the cost of fixing that going to go into the cost of petroleum? Probably not.”

While many other petroleum companies are investing hundreds of millions of dollars into algae research, BP has invested approximately $10 million into this next-generation biofuel.

Over the past several years, many executives left BP to become more involved in the research and development of algal biofuels and other green sector technologies.

Cynthia “CJ” Warner is one of those executives. After 20 years with BP, she left her position as head of global refining in February 2009 and is now the president of Sapphire Energy, a company based in California whose focus is the production of algal biofuels.

“I had an epiphany that if I was going to put so much personal energy into making something happen, it was a lot better to create the key to the future than to nurse along the dying past,” said Warner in an interview with Fast Company.

Other BP execs who have left in favor of greener technologies include: Lee Edwards, former president and CEO of BP Solar, left to work in biofuels at Virent Energy Systems; K’Lynne Johnson of BP’s Innovene division, who now leads Elevance Renewable Sciences to search for natural, sustainable alternatives to petrochemicals; and Janet Roemer, also of Innovene, who went on to head up Verenium, focusing on biofuels and enzymes.
Natural Gas

IS IT RIGHT FOR APPALACHIA?

By Derek Speranza

It’s the middle of July in West Trenton, N.J. More than 600 protesters have gathered outside a meeting of the Delaware River Basin Commission, speaking out to protect the region’s drinking water and water reserves from contamination.

The issue? Natural gas drilling – a controversial practice that has been by some labeled “environmentally safe.” But the citizens of West Trenton are calling to end the process altogether until more environmental research can be done.

Despite the environmental concerns, demand for natural gas as both a transportation fuel and an electricity source has been steadily increasing over the last few decades, which has had small, yet demonstrable economic benefits to Appalachia.

Outside of Asheville, N.C., a greenhouse operation relies on natural gas to heat its facilities in the wintertime. The gas they purchase through PSNC Energy, a large gas provider in North Carolina, is cheaper than oil and burns cleaner than coal.

For these reasons, natural gas is gaining popularity – but its position as a sustainable solution for the future of the Appalachian region remains to be determined.

Some of the Issues

Natural gas is a fossil fuel, and its burning releases new CO2 into the air. That said, it is the single cleanest burning fossil fuel on the market, producing about 45 percent less CO2 than coal, and 30 percent less than petroleum.

While gas burns cleaner than its competitors, the extraction of the gas worries many environmentalists. The most common process of natural gas extraction is hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking” – a technique that involves drilling deep into the earth, fracturing rock beneath the surface, and injecting a solution of water and chemicals to prop open the fissures in order to remove the gas.

Under current copyright laws, gas companies in many states do not have to disclose the mixture of chemicals they inject during fracking, raising questions about the possible presence of contaminants.

Aside from the injected fluid, large amounts of wastewater are created as a byproduct of hydraulic fracturing, placing unprecedented burden on water treatment plants.

The Marcellus Shale is one of the largest natural gas reserves in the United States. A gigantic gas field located in the heart of the Appalachians (covering large portions of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia), the Marcellus Shale is the source of much debate over the sharp increase of “fracking” permits in the region – and incidentally a sharp increase of wastewater.

The wastewater from hydraulic fracturing contains natural contaminants from the earth – mostly a salty mineral mixture called Total Dissolved Solids (TDS), and sometimes carcinogens such as benzene and cadmium.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, water treatment plants in the state are not prepared to handle TDS wastewater in the extreme quantities in which it is being produced – and this is exactly what brought the New Jersey protesters out in droves.

The EPA concluded in a 2004 study that the process of hydraulic fracturing is safe and has no definite effects on drinking water, but criticism of the report prompted the U.S. Congress to request a new study, scheduled for release in 2012.

Benefits and Concerns

Natural gas is the cleanest burning fossil fuel. It also comes relatively cheap. PSNC Energy, the North Carolina provider, says the price of the natural gas equivalent to one gallon of gasoline is currently about $1.50, significantly less than its petroleum counterpart.

Angela Townshend, public relations official for PSNC, says that while demand for natural gas in Western North Carolina has not increased, it can provide key economic support to businesses in the region.

“Natural gas is often that certain aspect of industry businesses are looking for to meet their energy and manufacturing needs,” said Townshend, citing the Asheville greenhouse among other businesses that rely on PSNC’s gas.

Townshend also says that PSNC offers small incentives for people to switch to more efficient natural gas systems in their homes, offering rebates intended to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

While the use of natural gas in the Appalachian region is not nearly as great as in areas further east, Townshend attributes this to differences in economic development, and says that there is nothing inherently prohibiting Appalachia from further utilizing the resource.

“But PSNC is exclusively a provider,” Townshend reminds. “We don’t do drilling or exploration of any kind.”

The excess load that fracking wastewater places on water treatment plants could potentially burden the taxpayers, who would ultimately be responsible for funding any improvements made to government-run treatment facilities.

Large electric utilities in the Southeast, who have long relied on coal as their primary energy source, are also starting to look toward natural gas. Progress and Duke Energies plan to to retire or convert 24 of their 47 coal-fired generators in North Carolina, with plans to replace a portion of this capacity with natural gas.

As Appalachian moves toward the future, the region must consider the vast energy potential of sources other than coal. Is natural gas the answer? All that is certain is as of now is that the true net economic benefit of natural gas remains a question.

Europe’s New Energy: Natural Gas vs. Wind

In 2009, new wind installations in Europe outpaced new gas installations for the first time ever, with 10 gigawatts of new wind capacity and only 7 gigawatts of new gas capacity.

This reverses a trend reported in 2006, when 20 gigawatts of new gas capacity and 9 gigawatts of new wind capacity were added.

In terms of overall capacity, latest figures still have gas in the lead, with 119 gigawatts of gas energy produced annually, compared to 85 gigawatts of wind energy produced annually.
A Glance at the Political Landscape of Appalachia

By Derek Speranza

What is in store for the future of Appalachia? With midterm elections approaching in November, it might be more appropriate to ask: who is in store for the future of Appalachia?

Inextricably tied to its deep-seated history of coal, yet looking toward the future of sustainable energy, the Appalachian region is in a time of transition. The Appalachian Voice examines who will be leading the region come November, and what energy options and viewpoints the potential candidates will bring with them.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Candidates for each race are listed in alphabetical order. The Appalachian Voice does not endorse any of the following political candidates or their affiliate political parties.

Virginia: Robert Hurt (R) vs. Tom Perriello (D)

Republican Robert Hurt is challenging Democratic incumbent Tom Perriello for Virginia’s 5th congressional district, a race that could have an important impact on Appalachia’s energy future. District 5 covers a large area of central Virginia.

Hurt, a lawyer and a politician, has previously served on the Chatham, Va., town council and the Virginia House of Delegates, and he currently serves in the Virginia state senate. During his time as state senator, he took the lead in creating the executive cabinet position of Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry. He is very passionate about stimulating the economy of Virginia through free market practices and limited government involvement. Hurt opposes the cap and trade legislation supported by the Obama administration.

Tom Perriello, a first-term congressional representative, supports leading Virginia in reducing carbon emissions while simultaneously increasing economic productivity. Perriello also supports increased production of domestic oil in the short term, but ultimately favors the discontinuation of fossil fuels altogether. He has co-sponsored the American Clean Energy and Security Act / ACES (H.R. 2454) and other renewable energy initiatives, opposes mountaintop removal coal mining, co-sponsored the Clean Water Protection Act (H.R. 1310) and served as lead proponent of the Rural Star Act (H.R. 4785), which provides incentives for energy efficiency investment in rural areas.

Kentucky: Jack Conway (D) vs. Rand Paul (R)

The retirement of Kentucky senator Jim Bunning has left open an important U.S. senate seat, and two up-and-coming politicians are squaring off to take the reins.

Jack Conway is a Democrat who has served as Kentucky’s Attorney General since 2008 and previously ran for congress in 2002. In the past, Conway has opposed “cap and trade” legislation that would limit greenhouse gas emissions, citing the potential detriment to the coal industry that he sees as crucial to the Appalachian economy. He does, however, support more environmentally safe mining practices and has shown concern over the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining and valley fills. He does not approve of waivers to regulations that could allow businesses to evade environmental responsibility.

Rand Paul is a Republican who is the son of congressman Ron Paul of Texas, and he is both an ophthalmologist and a politician. Paul has traditionally supported small government and significantly limited regulation of business. In this vein he supports a free market approach to energy that would allow wind, solar, and geothermal energy industries to freely compete, with potential tax cuts for renewable energy production. However, Paul opposes government subsidies of renewable energy on the grounds that the injection of funding into industry distorts the market and could impede the most efficient development of many energy sources. He is generally supportive of the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining.

West Virginia: The Special Election

The death of the longest-serving congressman in history, Robert Byrd, D–W.Va., led to the appointment of Carte Goodwin as the interim senator in West Virginia. On November 2, a special election will be held to determine a permanent successor for the final two years of Byrd’s term, and Goodwin has said he will not run in this race.

Several candidates are lining up for both primaries. One prominent candidate in the Democratic primary is Joe Manchin, the current governor of West Virginia, who is running as a self-proclaimed “pro-coal” candidate for Byrd’s seat. In addition to coal, Manchin has supported renewable energy, citing pollution concerns.

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1984 and 2006 senate races. Raese supports the development of existing energy industries such as oil and coal and also supports drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but he has also voiced encouragement for the development of energy alternatives, citing pollution concerns.
Acknowledging A Time For Transition

A friend of mine has a son who is serving in Afghanistan. His home is in the mountains of Boone, North Carolina, where tourism and a sizable state-run university dictate a relatively stable economy and jobs to be had once he—God willing—returns.

But there are many such sons and daughters with homes in coalfield regions of West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky who will not be as fortunate in their post-tour-of-duty lives. Available jobs are at an all-time low in these regions, known to be among the poorest in the country. The coal industry blames federal regulations on mountaintop removal coal mining for the decline in jobs.

According to the bureau of labor statistics, however, the 1950s saw 120,000 direct coal miners in the state of West Virginia alone while in 2008 there were around 20,000. Most of these job losses stemmed from the switch from underground to surface and mountaintop removal mining, which requires fewer workers and maximizes company profits.

Coal companies have also increasingly rejected unionization, resulting in fewer worker benefits, lower pay, and increasingly unsafe working conditions. Again, all in the name of profit.

The poverty rate in Appalachia hovers near a staggering 24%, drug usage is at an all time high and an economic future dependent on coal seams beyond peak production looks grim.

If elected officials in West Virginia, Kentucky and Virginia do not cease backdoor deals and intimate relations with the fossil fuels industry and begin to conceive of more realistic—and 21st Century—alternatives, a regional depression of epic proportions seems imminent.

Those who can afford to will migrate to other states, though lack of education or training in industries other than coal mining may relegate many to low-paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement.

Those without the means to move will be left to scramble for odd jobs and remnants of coal-related jobs, while the poorest slip deeper into poverty, some living in houses resembling little more than shacks and suffering from poor health and malnourishment.

Is this what the fossil fuels industry calls the American dream?

Environmental groups have talked for years about ‘now’ being the time to create the foundation of a new economic plan for Appalachia. In truth, Yesterday was the time for laying the foundation. By today we should be implementing said plan, so that we might in days to come reap the rewards with a renewed, vibrant regional pride. Instead, residents of the coalfields are economic prisoners of a system constructed with 19th century ideals and fueled by the pursuit of profit.

We are out of time.

Viewpoint

The opinions expressed in Viewpoints are those of the author’s and are not necessarily reflected by The Appalachian Voice

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE: Build It Up, W.Va.

By Joe Gorman

Appalachia’s population is aging and its youth are leaving. This is a critical moment: for a sustainable future we need to give youth a reason to stay here.

Currently, the Appalachian economy is choked by extractive industries and doesn’t offer much for people who don’t want to mine coal or offer ‘fries with that.’ This is the big-picture reason we created the Build-It-Up West Virginia summer program—to instill hope and values of sustainability in young people and hook youth into creative and proactive forms of resistance that are building diverse and regional economies.

I see food and energy as key components of sustainability in Appalachia’s future. All energy production is extractive, but the more we produce our own energy, the bigger the incentive is to boot out practices that destroy our natural systems that supply us with water and food.

West Virginia can easily provide all its own energy from less harmful, decentralized, renewable sources if we can break our exploitation by extractive corporations and invest in energy conservation.

There is a multifaceted fight against the energy status quo, but we are working to get youth involved in grassroots renewable energy projects as well.

Though our first major exports were pels, cattle and moonshine, West Virginia now sits at the bottom of the list for agriculture, and most farmers are on the verge of retirement.

But the Green Revolution’s focus on large-scale monocultures caused it to skip over Appalachia, and sustainable food traditions never fully disappeared. Farmers are physically closer than agricultural people in other parts of the country, which facilitates traditional knowledge sharing and building self-sufficient communities.

So in my work, I will continue to foster those connections and inspire youth with the concrete change we make in local and sustainable energy and food.

Joe Gorman is the group coordinator for Build-It-Up West Virginia, a project of the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC) sponsored by Americorps VISTA, Step-by-Step West Virginia, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, and Coal River Mountain Watch. The 2010 program started June 6th and continues through August 1st.
The “Magic” Behind the Light Switch

By Derek Speranza

There is often a mental disconnect between flicking on the light switch and actually thinking about the source of that electric power. Tom Hansell’s The Electricity Fairy reminds us that there is no magical fairy leaving electricity under our pillow.

The film begins with a cinematic overview of the history of Appalachian Coal mining and electricity and is very accessible, even for people who know nothing of the subject. It examines the lives of real Appalachians who were raised on coal mining and demonstrates the enormous impact of the industry on the region.

From every day citizens to government officials, from environmental activists to Dominion Power executives, the film examines every aspect of the debate surrounding the cleanliness of coal. Eventually, the controversy is embodied in the battle over the approval of Dominion’s new coal-fired power plant in Wise County, Va.

In the spirit of true documentary filmmaking, The Electricity Fairy shows rather than tells. Hansell does not skew the focus of the story with a predisposition or provincial agenda, which is too often the case with modern documentaries intent only on incensing the viewership (à la Michael Moore), but instead gives equal time to both sides of the argument. The Dominion Power executives — who are not portrayed as evil corporate villains — share their honest beliefs about the economic benefits of the power plant, while the renewable energy camp points out the negatives, such as dangerous mercury levels in the water, air pollution and the devastation caused by mountaintop removal mining.

It is this lack of sensationalism and commitment to honesty that allows The Electricity Fairy to believably deliver the facts, and in doing so it is guaranteed to leave the viewer thinking a little more about what actually happens with the flick of a light switch. In the sweeping landscapes of the film (courtesy of some impressive cinematography), the audience can see firsthand the stark destruction caused by strip mining, and is also reminded of a region uncertain of where to go from here.
INSIDE APPALACHIAN VOICES

You Say Goodbye, I Say Hello!

This past year has been an excellent one, with a team full of talented writers. As this issue goes to press, there are tearful eyes in the newsroom. But as we say goodbye to our Managing Editor, Maureen Halsema, our Voice summer interns Megan Naylor and Derek Speranza (who both have stories in this issue!), and our Riverkeeper interns Kara Dodson and Kimberly Hamilton, we are also saying hello to our newest members of the team.

Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow...

“This year has been one of the most challenging, exciting and educational year of my life,” said Maureen Halsema, who volunteered through National Field Coordinator working in Appalachian Voices' Upper Watauga region. Citizen scientists in select areas will come to the team Kate Rooth, our new National Field Coordinator working in our Washington, D.C. office. Kate will be working on our end mountaintop removal coal mining campaign, helping to organize community members and citizens to effect legislation that would stop mountaintop removal.

Kate comes to Appalachian Voices from Rainforest Action Network, where she worked on their mountaintop removal campaign, targeting both regulators and financiers of coal mining. She previously worked for Greenpeace, where she contributed to a variety of climate and clean energy campaigns.

“I am thrilled to be working at App Voices,” said Kate. “Not only have I already met so many incredible supporters of our campaign, but I am humbled by each persons dedication to ending mountaintop removal. This fall I look forward to working on two Appalachian Treasures tours as well as our National Lobby Day. Be sure to swing by if you are ever in D.C.!”

Kate originally hails from Cashiers, N.C. and graduated from Lehigh University in 2005 with a degree in Political and Environmental Science. Kate is also involved with Rising Tide North America.

We would also like to welcome to the team Jillian Randel, who grew up in New Hampshire and graduated last year from the University of Tampa with a degree in Political Science. Jillian will spend a year as our Americorps Communications Associate volunteer and will serve as The Appalachian Voice Associate Editor.

“I am excited to have the opportunity to work with Appalachian Voices,” said Jillian. “I really enjoy writing and I hope I learn a lot from this organization and community!”

Jillian spent the last six months obtaining her yoga teacher certification. She also loves hiking, biking, reading and playing with her dog, Easton. Welcome Jillian!

Appalachian Treasures Launches 3-City Tour

Appalachian Voices is traveling north this September to showcase our multimedia slideshow, Appalachian Treasures! We will be on the road in Boston, Maine, Philadelphia and D.C. as part of our campaign to end the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining.

Appalachian Treasures is an educational campaign to gain support for the Clean Water Protection Act (H.R. 1310) and the Appalachia Restoration Act (S. 696). The presentation depicts the dire situation in the coal regions of Appalachia and encourages Americans to help protect some of our nation’s oldest mountains and communities.

Visit AppalachianVoices.org for details!

AV To Launch New Water Testing Initiative

Appalachian Water Watch will work to address water quality issues related to coal, one of the biggest polluters in the region. Citizen scientists in select areas will be trained to test their local waterways in order to access potential patterns of violations. Stay tuned for more details.

Musical Tour Gives Us A Louder Appalachian Voice

Musicians Ben Sollee and Daniel Martin Moore, and My Morning Jacket’s Yim Yames recently wrapped up the Appalachian Voices Tour to raise awareness about mountaintop removal mining. A representative from Appalachian Voices was able to join them to pass out information. Thanks to Ben, Daniel and Yim for the opportunity! Learn more at iLoveMountains.org/dear-companion.

Shoe Shopping That Also Protects Mountains

Mast General Store and Patagonia have teamed up during the month of September to support Appalachian Voices by graciously donating $10 for every pair of Patagonia shoes sold. There is a little time left—and even if you don’t live near a Mast Store, you can order online at MastGeneralStore.com.

Celebration and Inspiration in Charlottesville, VA

On Aug. 12, Appalachian Voices’ staff and board met with members new and old in Charlottesville, Va for a movie date night. After a screening of the documentary, Cool Country, people had the chance to meet with the director, the producer and activists from the film, and also enjoy live music by a local band featured on the soundtrack.

The event in Charlottesville was a great way to join our members and supporters to celebrate how far we’ve come, and to gain inspiration for the work ahead. Thanks to everyone who attended the show; we enjoyed meeting you!
Riverkeeper Festival A Success!

By Parker Stevens

On July 24, Appalachian Voices kicked off our first ever Watauga Riverkeeper Festival in Valle Crucis, N.C., where hundreds of visitors joined us to celebrate outdoor recreation, environmental stewardship and of course, the Watauga River.

The Alberta Boys and Melissa Reaves played great music all day while kids and families enjoyed games in the park, dips in the river and lunch featuring local foods from the Boone Meat Center, Earth Fare and our own Executive Director, Willa Mays.

Donna Lisenby, the Upper Watauga Riverkeeper, led adventures in the river where people learned all about the exciting river and local waterways.

The afternoon included a river parade complete with costumes on loan from the Elkland Art Center; children dressed as river droplets marched around the park beneath a billowing cloth river. Meanwhile, children and adults along with members of the Appalachian Voices staff and board buried their faces in watermelon for no-hands watermelon eating contest (which is much harder than it looks!).

Thanks to everyone who helped make our inaugural festival a smashing success. See you again next year!

Fish Kill Exposes Asphalt Sealant Pollution Problem

By Jed Grubbs

On July 17, polluted runoff killed all aquatic life in a 1.5-mile long stretch of Hodge’s Creek in Boone, N.C. Donna Lisenby, Appalachian Voices’ Upper Watauga Riverkeeper, was on the scene a few hours after the event. Lisenby, along with the Town of Boone Fire Department, investigated the fish kill, tracing the pollution source to a BB&T parking lot on Hwy. 105.

After days of talking with local contractors, the Boone police department, and a spokesperson from BB&T, the Watauga Riverkeeper team was able to determine the cause of the fish kill to be a coal-tar based asphalt sealant applied to the BB&T parking lot by Sunshine Stripping Asphalt and Seal Coat of Pine Hall N.C.

Coal tar—which would be listed as a “hazardous waste” were it not for a special federal exemption—contains benzo[a]pyrene. Benzo[a] pyrene is a chemical that made EPA’s list of 12 priority “persistent bioaccumulative toxins.”

Eyewitnesses report seeing the sealant— which is water soluble—being immediately applied before a heavy storm rain, which washed it from the parking lot into the creek. Of the many fish that were killed, the majority were trout. Lisenby expects it to be more than a year before the trout population recovers.

Neither BB&T nor Sunshine Asphalt Stripping and Seal Coat reported the coal tar asphalt sealant spill and subsequent fish kill, nor did either attempt to clean up the spill.

Coal tar is applied to asphalt across the country, and concerns are growing that toxins from the product are being tracked into homes, schools, hospitals and other buildings. Coal tar-based asphalt sealants are a triple threat: it can be inhaled, ingested and absorbed through skin. It even comes off onto basketballs in school gymnasiums.

The city of Austin, Texas, banned the product almost five years ago when it was discovered to be damaging the local ecosystem. More recently other cities, including Washington, D.C., have followed suit. Minnesota has banned the purchase of coal-tar sealcoat products by state agencies as of July 1. Overwhelmingly, however, the product remains unregulated.

On July 21, Lisenby and her team investigated a second fish kill that also occurred in the town of Boone. The kill occurred after kerosene from Mountain Oil Company spilled onto the ground and soaked into the soil, eventually reaching the water table and seeping into nearby Hardin Creek.

In contrast to the previous incident, Mountain Oil immediately reported their spill and began efforts to minimize the impact to Hardin Creek. Significantly less aquatic life was killed in the Mountain Oil spill.
Wonders Never Cease

The views are ancient, the experiences are all brand new.

The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation which was established to preserve Grandfather Mountain, operate the nature park in the public interest, and participate in educational and research activities. All proceeds from sales of tickets and souvenirs go toward caring for and presenting Grandfather Mountain in a manner that inspires good stewardship in others.

Grandfather Mountain

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**Naturalist’s Notebook**

**Saving a Species**

**NORTH CAROLINA’S RED WOLF RECOVERY PROGRAM**

*By Josephine Butler*

The Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge rests on 154,000 acres of marshy swampland just south of the Albemarle Sound in coastal North Carolina. Among the high and low pocosins, fresh and brackish water marshes and swamps, the refuge is home to an array of native species like the American woodcock, the Atlantic white cedar and the elusive red wolf—considered one of the most endangered animals on the planet.

Once an abundant predator of eastern and south-central U.S., red wolf populations were decimated by the 1960s due to aggressive predator control programs and habitat loss.

The refuge, established March 14, 1984, has been home to the red wolf, or Canis rufus, since 1987. A wild population of roughly 100 wolves roams this 28-mile breadth of land. Approximately 200 wolves live in a captive-breeding program known as the Red Wolf Recovery and Species Survival Plan, jointly managed by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The red wolf is smaller in stature than their more familiar counterparts, Canis lupus, or gray wolf. Weighing in at only 45 to 80 pounds, the average adult red wolf stands 26 inches at the shoulder and measures around 4 feet from the tip of the nose to the tail. While red wolves are mostly brown and beige colored, they are known namely for their reddish tufts of fur found around the ears and neck.

*Canis Rufus* live in packs of up to eight wolves, usually including a breeding pair and offspring of various ages. They primarily feed on small mammals such as raccoons, rabbits and rodents, as well as the larger white-tailed deer.

The once vast range of red wolves, which stretched from Texas all the way east to Florida with some reports of the species as far north as Canada, was diminished to a remnant population discovered by a few concerned scientists along the Gulf coast in the 1970s.

**Raising Wolves**

Warren Parker is well into his 70s, with eyes that wrinkle in the most earnest kind of way when he smiles. Parker was with the USFWS from 1961 to 1991. This towering but slender and unassuming man vigorously shakes his head in humility should he ever be referred to as “the Father of the red wolf.”

In 1982, fifteen years after the red wolf was catapulted to the top of the endangered list with the passage of the Endangered Species Preservation Act, Parker received a phone call asking him to serve as the director of a new national program that would be the first of its kind—the Red Wolf Recovery Project.

According to Parker, the late Curt Carley, a biologist and former predator control officer for the USFWS, is “the real guy that saved the red wolves.” Carley recognized the near extinction of the red wolf and worked to develop a system of external measurements that would allow scientists to properly distinguish them from coyotes and gray wolves.

Only 17 of the 400 animals Carley and his colleagues initially trapped in southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana were found to be “pure” red wolves. Fourteen were shipped to a mink ranch outside of Tacoma, Wash., where they could live without the danger of canine parasites—such as intestinal parasites like heartworms and hookworms—to become the first captive breeders.

As the population began its slow recovery, Parker understood the need for a suitable stretch of land where the USFWS could eventually reintroduce red wolves into the wild. After relinquishing what initially looked like a promising piece of land between the Kentucky and Tennessee border, he was losing hope.

“It’s the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ folklore that led to the decimations of wolf populations in the first place,” Parker said. “It seemed like everyone wanted to help the wolves, but not in their own backyards.”

In the spring of 1984, a relieved Parker received notification from the USFWS that Prudential Life Insurance Company had donated a large piece of land spanning parts of Dare and Hyde counties in northeastern North Carolina for the project.

Today, 117 red wolves roam this swampy expanse now known as the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

According to David Rabon, Red Wolf Recovery Program coordinator, “The wolf population has grown and so has the recovery area. Wolves now occur across 1.7 million acres that span five counties, not just the Dare County mainland.”

**A Mountain Home**

Southern Appalachia has also played a role in the efforts to revitalize red wolf populations. In 1991, the USFWS released red wolves into Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The inability of the wolves to establish a home range within the park and low pup survival rates led to their removal in 1998.

Red wolves can still be found in the region at the Western North Carolina Nature Center in Asheville, one of only 40 breeding sites worldwide.

According to Director Chris Gentile, three red wolves currently reside at the Center – Angel and Rufus, the breeding pair, and their female pup, Mayo (see sidebar at left).

As far as what the future has in store for the red wolves in eastern North Carolina, Rabon and his colleagues are hopeful that the population will continue to grow.

“It’s important to remember that the red wolves were once a top predator in their food chain,” said Gentile, “and anytime you lose a piece of that puzzle, it becomes a weaker system. When Mayo was born last spring, it was like restoring one of those missing pieces.”

**Breeding Recovery at the WNC Nature Center**

*By Maureen Halsema*

The Western North Carolina Nature Center, based out of Asheville, is one of 40 facilities participating in the Red Wolf Recovery and Species Survival Program.

The living public education venue—full of North Carolina-native plants and animals—joined the red wolf recovery reintroduction program in the 1980s.

“Since then, we’ve had several successful breedings from our pair,” said Chris Gentile, director of the Western North Carolina Nature Center. “We’ve even had two of our red wolves reintroduced into the wild.”

The most recent success was Mayo, the cub of Angel and Rufus named for her birthday, Cinco de Mayo, in 2009. Mayo could be selected for reintroduction or to breed with another red wolf in a few years.

The red wolves are handled differently at the nature center than the rest of the animal residents.

“We are not as hands-on with them as we are with other animals,” Gentile said. “We don’t want them to be used to people, because they might be selected for reintroduction into the wild.”

This recovery program not only helps save a species, but also teaches people about it in a very real setting, emphasizing the importance of each link in the ecosystem.

“Since red wolves are an animal that has long existed in the state of North Carolina, it’s great to show the public and tell them a little bit about some of the problems they are facing,” Gentile said.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Since the writing of this article, Warren Parker, the “Father of the Red Wolf,” passed away at the age of 76. To remember Warren and to continue his legacy of reviving the red wolf population, his family encourages memorial contributions to the International Wolf Center, 1396 Hwy 169, Ely, MN 55731-8129.
A pelican beach sculpture by artist Dan Smith spreads its wings in Pensacola, Fla., just weeks after the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Smith, a finalist in the 2009 Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition, is currently exhibiting a collection of historically inspired installation pieces entitled MANInfested Destiny: From Boone to Boon, at the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts in Boone, N.C. The show incorporates thematic photographs, paintings and natural and manmade objects based on Daniel Boone’s life. The exhibit will be on display through Nov. 5. On Saturdays through Oct. 2, Smith will lead walks from the Turchin Center gallery to locations featured in his work documenting the historical Daniel Boone.

By Jillian Randel

Three men pushing a Christmas tree bailer, a single set of footprints on a snowy highway, morning shadows over the Blue Ridge Mountains... how can one capture the essence of Appalachian life in a frame?

That’s the challenge of the 8th annual Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition, which is accepting submissions now through December 17, 2010. The competition encourages amateur and professional photographers nationwide to highlight some of Appalachia’s most distinguishing features through frame.

For its second year in a row, Appalachian Voices is sponsoring the category titled “Our Ecological Footprint.” This subject encourages photographers to snapshot noteworthy trees along the Parkway that create the diverse and unique character of the Appalachian region. Photographers are asked to identify the species of tree and record its exact location on the Parkway.

“The other six categories for the competition include Adventure; Blue Ridge Parkway Vistas; Blue Ridge Parkway Share the Journey @ Culture; Flora and Fauna; and Landscape. The Blue Ridge Parkway Share the Journey changing category this year is The Parkway Tree Project. This category encourages photographers to snapshot noteworthy trees along the Parkway that create the diverse and unique character of the Appalachian region. Photographers are asked to identify the species of tree and record its exact location on the Parkway.

“As we celebrate the rich cultural and natural heritage of the Southern Appalachians, we feel a responsibility to also highlight threats to that heritage,” said Andrew Miller, coordinator of Appalachian State University’s Outdoor Programs and organizer of the Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition. “We hope to highlight the imagery of photographers and activists capturing the cultural and environmental degradation happening in the Appalachians and support the advocacy efforts of Appalachian Voices.”

Judges will narrow down the competition to 46 photographs which will hang in the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts in Boone, N.C. from Feb. 4 through June 4, 2011. Finalists will receive $4,000 in cash and prizes and a portion of the proceeds will go to support Outdoor Programs Student Outdoor Learning Expeditions at Appalachian State.

The competition runs until 5:00 P.M. on December 17, 2010. Applicants must be age 13 and up. Please submit photos to www.appmtnphotocomp.org.

The Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition is a partnership between Outdoor Programs and the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts at Appalachian State University and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. AMPC is made possible through the sponsorship of Virtual Blue Ridge, the premier online resource for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Support for the AMPC is provided by Appalachian Voices, Bistro Roca Inventive American Cuisine, Feetloggers Outdoor and Travel Outfitters, Mast General Store, Peabody’s Merchants of Fine Beer and Wine, and Smoky Mountain Living Magazine.

Category winners from the 2009 AMPC included: Blue Ridge Parkway Vista—Leave Only Footprints by Dale King; Flora & Fauna—Windswept Grasses in Craggy Gardens by Bill Gozansky; Our Ecological Footprint—Coal Fly Ash Sludge Disaster by Jerry D. Greer.