



AppalachianVoices

Protecting the Central and Southern Appalachian Mountain Region

January 30, 2012

The Honorable Bill Haslam
1st Floor, State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243

Governor Haslam,

Appalachian Voices is proud to serve and protect the economy, ecology, and rural mountain communities of Tennessee and the greater Central and Southern Appalachian Region. Our top priority for 2012 is ending mountaintop removal coal mining.

For Tennessee, that means we must pass the Scenic Vistas Protection Act. We ask for your leadership in supporting this critical bipartisan bill, while taking the strongest possible opposition to high-elevation surface mining and mountaintop removal in Tennessee.

The Scenic Vistas Protection Act would ban surface mining over 2,000 feet in elevation, protecting Tennessee's most beautiful and important economic assets. This legislation has bipartisan support in both houses. Tennessee produces less than 0.2 percent of America's coal, and our production is in steep decline. However, surface mining has negatively impacted more than 125 square miles of the Cumberland Plateau, and many more peaks are threatened by high-elevation surface mining and mountaintop removal. Appalachian Voices believes that we don't need to blast our mountains apart to mine coal in Tennessee. Surface mining is increasingly done by out of state coal operators such as Premium Coal who come to Tennessee, tear down our mountains and pollute our watersheds. In fact, 95 percent of the high-elevation surface mines that would be impacted by the Scenic Vistas bill are owned by out of state coal operators.

Mountaintop removal means fewer mining jobs for Tennessee. Since 1985, Tennessee coal mining jobs are down 85% due to declining production and the increase in the percentage of coal production that comes from surface mining. Studies show that communities around mountaintop removal have higher unemployment and higher poverty than similar Appalachian communities that rely on underground mining. Since 2009, an increased oversight of mountaintop removal operations has meant an increase in mining jobs, due to the fact that companies are beginning to rely more and more on underground mining to meet their production. Appalachian coal mining jobs are up despite the recession because there is less mountaintop removal.

In addition, Tennessee taxpayers are wasting millions every year to prop up the coal industry. In 2009 an independent study showed that when all revenues and expenditures are considered the coal industry and its direct and indirect employees present a net cost of approximately \$3 million to the State of Tennessee. The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), our state's largest utility, pays more for Tennessee coal than any other coal they purchase due to the high sulfur content. TVA purchases less than 0.7% of its coal from Tennessee, and less than 0.09% of its coal from Tennessee surface mines.

Boone, N.C. (main office)
191 Howard Street
Boone, NC 28607

Washington, D.C.
122 C St. NW, Ste. 240
Washington, DC 20001

Charlottesville, Va.
408 E. Market Street, Suite 201C
Charlottesville, VA 22902

Nashville, Tenn.
4810 Merrill Lane
Nashville, TN 37211

Tennessee's mountain-driven tourism industry employs more than 175,000 people in our state, and brings in more than \$13 billion every single year. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the most visited National Park in the entire country, drawing more than 9 million visitors every year, twice as many as the Grand Canyon. The tourism provides 470 times more jobs than the coal industry in Tennessee.

Numerous peer-reviewed studies show direct links between mountaintop removal mining and negative human health impacts. When a mountain is blasted apart, heavy metals and chemicals like arsenic, lead, selenium, mercury, copper, chromium and others enter the air and surrounding watersheds. Studies show increased mortality rates, lung cancer, and chronic heart, kidney, and lung disease in communities surrounding mountaintop removal operations. In 2011, a study found that counties in and near mountaintop mining areas had higher rates for five of six types of birth defects including circulatory/respiratory, musculoskeletal, central nervous system, gastrointestinal, and urogenital defects.

It is urgent that we protect our mountains and mountain communities by ending mountaintop removal and high-elevation surface mining in this state. We must pass the Tennessee Scenic Vistas Protection Act.

Governor Haslam, we urge you to bring action to your stated opposition to mountaintop removal by personally encouraging members of the *Senate Committee on Environment, Conservation and Tourism*, and the *House Committee on Conservation and the Environment* to pass the Scenic Vistas Act immediately. The Tennessee General Assembly has the opportunity to come together, protect our mountains, protect our economy, protect our jobs, and protect our public health, all with the support of public opinion. Our state requires your leadership. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



**Willa Coffey Mays
Executive Director
Appalachian Voices**

**J.W. Randolph
Tennessee Director
Appalachian Voices**