

The Appalachian VOICE

April/May 2016

20
YEARS
& STILL
FREE

From the Ground UP

Climbers Build Community, Opportunity in the Region

RECLAIMING Appalachia

Abandoned mine funds could fuel an economic revival

ALSO
INSIDE:



Natural Gas
Pipelines
Cut Deep



Dance of the
Timberdoodle



Co-ops Help
Put Solar
on Homes

EDITOR..... JAMIE GOODMAN
MANAGING EDITOR..... MOLLY MOORE
ASSOCIATE EDITOR..... ELIZABETH E. PAYNE
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR..... BRIAN SEWELL
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR..... ELIZA LAUBACH
DISTRIBUTION MANAGER..... LAUREN ESSICK
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT..... CHARLOTTE WRAY
GRAPHIC DESIGNER..... MAGGIE SHERWOOD
GRAPHIC DESIGNER..... HALEY ROGERS
MARKETING ASSISTANT..... DYLAN TURNER

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A note from the executive director

There's more than wildflowers budding in Appalachia this spring.

Efforts to revitalize local economies are proliferating as the coal industry declines, and an increasingly broad range of residents and stakeholders are joining the conversation. Appalachian Voices is working at the intersection of these endeavors in partnership with local citizens, civic leaders and other organizations.

We are advocating for the passage of the RECLAIM Act, a bipartisan federal bill that would expedite the release of \$1 billion to reclaim abandoned mine lands in places where these environmental cleanup projects would also promote economic development opportunities.

This bill has the support of key coal-state legislators, and it is a crucial step toward ensuring that the health and sustainability of Appalachia's economy is a national priority.

More than two dozen local government bodies have unanimously passed resolutions calling for federal investment in regional economic development. This reflects the enthusiastic support of engaged citizens and community leaders that is the essential driving force behind this effort.

For its part, the Obama administration has directed substantial funding to communities hard-hit by coal's decline to help with workforce training and other economic programs through the POWER Initiative. Read about both federal efforts on page 18.

As we advocate for passage of the RECLAIM Act, we continue to build on a series of community forums we co-hosted in southwest Virginia last year, where local residents shared their visions of new economies for their communities. We are now expanding that outreach to an open online forum where we hope hundreds more local citizens will contribute their ideas. And we're

taking a hard look at ways to bring major community investments in solar power to the area.

With so much promise this spring, we're excited to see our collective work bear fruit this year and beyond. The importance of your support for these efforts can't be overstated.

For the mountains,



Tom Cormons, Executive Director



Across Appalachia

Environmental News From Around the Region

The Butterfly Highway: Creating a Pollinator Pathway

By Charlotte Wray

Butterfly populations and other North American pollinator species, such as bees and moths, began to decline several decades ago. As the decline became more rapid in the 2000s, Angel Hjarving, director of pollinators at the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, decided to take matters into her own hands and formed the Butterfly Highway project in February 2016.

Hjarving's campaign aims to create a "highway" of native, flowering nectar plants, specifically milkweed, for the monarch butterfly. These "pit stops" will be both large-scale and residential, with community, residential and business gardens, and the project will also partner with organizations to ensure long-term garden sustainability.

The project has expanded from its origin in Charlotte, N.C., into western North Carolina, with new habitats and gardens forming in Asheville, Brevard, Hendersonville, Banner Elk and Boone.

Pollinators are vital to both the balance of ecosystems and the agricultural economy, since over 70 percent of crops require or yield higher production because of pollination.

The decrease in pollinator populations, especially the monarch butterfly, is due in part to increased urbanization, pesticides, agricultural practices and "limited floral resources," Hjarving says. Since the launch of the project, about 250 habitats have been planted or planned across North Carolina.

For more information, visit: butterflyhighway.org/bh-info

Middle School Student Influences State Reptile Selection

Thanks to the help of 11-year-old Aiden Coleman, Virginia's official state reptile may soon be the eastern garter snake. The snake, though fearful and notoriously smelly, is harmless to humans and known to be excellent at pest control. Coleman believes these factors, among others, make it deserving of the state

title. After he detailed this to State Delegate Brenda L. Pogge, she drafted a bill to honor the snake. The bill slithered its way through the general assembly with minimal opposition and was approved at the end of February. A decision from Gov. Terry McAuliffe will finalize the designation. —Dylan Turner

17-year Cicada Brood to Emerge This Spring

After 17 years of moving through five different stages of subterranean growth, this spring cicadas' wings will sing across a swath of eastern Ohio and northern West Virginia, according to the Charleston Gazette. Scientists expect that around mid-May, when the soil is warm enough and sufficient rain has fallen, a mass emergence of the locust-like insects will occur. Severe weather and changes to the landscape, among other factors, influence how many will emerge. When these cicadas last flew, in 1999, the U.S. Department of Agriculture described the 17-year brood as the largest that occurs in either state. — Eliza Laubach

Appalachian Trail Interns Wanted

Appalachian Trail Conservation Leadership Corps, formed by a partnership between The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the CAN'd Aid Foundation, offers 10-week paid internships for 18 to 25-year-olds to experience leadership and gain outdoor management skills from May to June.

Focusing on various skills including trail crew operations, invasive species control, visitor management, conservation leadership and more, these internships aim to prepare participants to work in outdoor conversation programs. For more information, visit tinyurl.com/at-conserve —Charlotte Wray

Pine Mountain One Step Closer to Full Protection

By Dylan Turner

In March, the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust announced that it had acquired 2,050 acres of Pine Mountain in order to preserve the area's natural habitats. The environmental conservation organization's purchase will add to the Pine Mountain Wildlands Corridor project, which plans to protect a portion of land stretching the entire 125-mile length of the mountain from Virginia to Tennessee. The land will also be incorporated into the existing Great Eastern Trail, a hiking path that stretches 1,800 miles through the Appalachian mountains from Alabama to New York.

In a press release, Executive Direc-

tor Hugh Archer called the tract of land "the single largest addition and most expensive investment in the Wildlands project in KNLT's 20 year history."

In recent months, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin has proposed cutting \$10 million from the budget of the Heritage Land Conservation Fund, a state board that provides funding for the conservation and preservation of natural areas. Though the newly protected section of Pine Mountain was purchased with private funds, the Pine Mountain Wildlands Corridor could still be affected. "Cuts to the heritage program could impede inclusion of this new reserve into the state parks system," says KNLT Assistant Director Greg Abernathy.

Connect to Sustainable Living at Whippoorwill Fest

Have you ever wanted to learn how to start a fire by friction? Or how to make bark into a basket? You can learn these skills and more at the sixth annual Whippoorwill Festival in eastern Kentucky this July.

The festival's goal is to promote sustainable living through sharing and practicing earth-based skills. The event also seeks to preserve ways of life that have fallen out of practice since modernity and manufacturing have changed the way humans interact with nature. At Whippoorwill, in addition to



Photo by Jameson Pfeil

onsite camping, people can participate in workshops on medicinal plants, birds, sustainable agriculture and survival skills. The gathering also honors Appalachian culture with a workshop on ballads and by offering nightly entertainment from regional musicians and jam sessions around the fire.

— Eliza Laubach

When: July 7-10 **Where:** Lago Linda Hideaway in Beattyville, Ky. **Cost:** \$35 - \$125. **Visit:** whippoorwillfest.com

Tennessee National Forest May Be Designated Wilderness

For the fourth time in the past eight years, Congress has the chance to increase conservation protections for land in east Tennessee to the highest level. Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN) introduced legislation in February to designate more than 7,000 acres of Cherokee National Forest as wilderness.

Big Laurel Branch and Sampson Mountain wilderness areas would also be expanded in some areas along the Appalachian Trail corridor. This proposal includes far less acreage than past unsuccessful proposals in the Senate, but it still garners substantial local support. — Eliza Laubach

GET INVOLVED

environmental & cultural events

See more at appvoices.org/calendar

Six Faiths, Six Voices, One Earth

Apr. 17, 7-8:30 p.m.: The Green Interfaith Network will host six faith speakers, discussing how faith and environmental stewardship can be intertwined. Johnson City, Tenn. Call 423-291-0964 or visit greeninterfaith.org

Helvetia Ramp Supper

April 30, 2 p.m.-until food runs out. Dance 8-11 p.m.: Wild Appalachian ramps are at the center of this traditional meal of early spring. Come eat a hearty meal and stay for dancing. Helvetia, W.Va. Visit helvetiawv.com/index.html

Natural Gas Infrastructure Webinar

May 3, 2-3 p.m.: Appalachian Voices will host a panel discussion about the environmental, financial and personal costs of the proposed pipeline projects. Free. Visit appvoices.org/webinars/

Wild South Green Gala

May 7, 6-10 p.m.: Showcasing the Wild South's 25-year legacy and honoring winners and nominees of the Roosevelt-Ashe Conservation Awards. Silent auction and raffle included. \$35. Asheville, N.C. Visit wildsouth.org/greengala

SWVA Economic Summit

May 12: This day-long event will discuss economic opportunities for southwest Virginia, including breakout sessions on topics like entrepreneurship, education, natural resources and business growth. \$25. Wise, Va. Visit: tinyurl.com/wise-economy

30th Appalachian Trail Days Festival

May 13-15: A three-day celebration of the Appalachian Trail, including a hiker parade, gear vendors and giveaways, and lots of hikers. Visit the AV table! Damascus, Va. Visit traildays.us

Earth Day Events



Earth Day Workday

April 22, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.: Join The Nature Conservancy for maintenance activities on the Kentucky Palisades nature preserves. Lancaster, Ky. To register visit tinyurl.com/ky-earthwork or call (502) 742-4521.

Earth Day Conversation with Barbara Kingsolver

April 22, 7 p.m.: The author will speak on art, life and the environment. Charlottesville, Va. \$25-48, benefiting Virginia Organizing. Call 434-979-1333 or visit theparamount.net.

Opera for the Earth

April 22, 5:30-7:30 p.m.: The Block Off Biltmore and the Asheville Lyric Opera present a nature-inspired opera performance. \$20, benefiting Appalachian Voices. Asheville, N.C. Visit theblockoffbiltmore.com/ or call 828-254-9277.

Earth Day Festival

April 23, 11 a.m.-11 p.m.: A day of panel discussions, educational activities and live music. Stop by the AV table! Appalachian South Folklife Center, Pipestem, W.Va. Visit folklifecenter.org/events/ or call 304-466-0626.

Piedmont Earth Day Fair

April 23, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.: The largest Earth Day event in the region will provide workshops and demonstrations on sustainable food systems. Stop by the AV table! Free. Winston-Salem, N.C. Visit peanc.org/earth-day-fair



Check out our listing of environmental summer camps for kids! Online at: appvoices.org/SummerCamps

Seedtime on the Cumberland

June 3-4: Join Appalshop for its annual summer festival with old-time and bluegrass musicians, art exhibits and hands-on workshops. Whitesburg, Ky. Visit seedtimefestival.org or call (606) 633-0108.

High Country Farm Tour

June 18: Support your local farmers and see where your food is grown. Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture's first tour will explore farms of Caldwell County, N.C. Visit farmtour.brwia.org

Rhododendron Festival

June 18-19: Celebrate the blossoms of Rhododendron Gardens with musicians, crafters, food and more. Roan Mountain State Park, Tenn. Visit tnstateparks.com or call 423-772-0190.



About the Cover

Climber Julia Statler traverses a climb called Periscope at Grayson Highlands State Park. Dan Brayack's stunning images of bouldering at the park in southwest Virginia are the centerpiece of this issue. "Grayson is one of the most beautiful parks I've ever visited, he says. "The highlands feel like a different world." Brayack's photographs also illustrate Aaron Parlier's climbing guidebook for the park, mentioned in our story on page 12. "The trees at Grayson just seem greener than anywhere else," Brayack says. "It seems like a different world." To view more of his work, visit brayackmedia.com



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“Social Enterprise” Expanding in Appalachia

By Molly Moore

The March 14 launch of Mountain Tech Media in Whitesburg, Ky., was a fun event with local supporters, food and speeches. Like most new businesses, the technology company aims to make a profit, but the worker-owned cooperative also intends to support community economic development in the area by providing media and web services to other ventures.

Mountain Tech Media is one of many businesses with a core goal of addressing a social problem — a concept known as “social enterprise.” Social enterprise businesses are motivated equally by profit and by a desire “to improve the community and the environment where that business is,” says Tom Redfern of the community development organization Rural Action. The nonprofit houses two social enterprises:

Zero Waste, a program that cleans up and reduces the environmental impact of various festivals, and Chesterhill Produce Auction, which provides a central market for rural farmers and draws customers from a 60-mile radius who are looking for affordable, fresh produce.

Social enterprise in Appalachia is on an “upward trajectory,” according to Redfern. In March, Rural Action helped organize the first Appalachian Conference on Social Enterprise, which was held in Huntington, W.Va., and included approximately 100 attendees from business, nonprofit and academic backgrounds. “People are looking for market-based entrepreneurial solutions to community problems, and this is what a social enterprise can address — something that can actually begin to sustain itself, [and] begin to employ people doing positive and sustainable work,” Redfern says.

Preliminary Draft Plans For Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Published

By Eliza Laubach

After four years of gathering public comment on how to manage the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests, which cover more than one million acres in western North Carolina, the U.S. Forest Service is releasing foundations of the draft forest plan as they are being developed.

This is a new approach for the agency, to promote transparency and increase opportunity for public input. A National

forest’s long-term plan undergoes an update process every 20 years. The full draft plan, which dictates management, is expected to be released in the fall.

The newly released drafted management practices, which cover the entire forests and are not site-specific, are categorized into different aspects of forest management, such as vegetation management and climate. Visit tinyurl.com/fsplanuc to view the Plan Under Construction website.

Russell Fork Makes “Most Endangered Rivers” List

In April, the Russell Fork River was listed as one of the most endangered waterways in the country by the conservation group American Rivers. The Russell Fork, which carved the gorge at the heart of Breaks Interstate Park on its path through Virginia and Kentucky, is threatened by Paramount Coal Company’s proposed Doe Branch mountaintop removal coal mine in Dickenson County, Va.

If the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Virginia government allow the mine to proceed, it would discharge toxic wastewater into four creeks that feed the Russell Fork, which itself is a

tributary of the Big Sandy River, home to endangered mussels and crayfish. Breaks Interstate Park draws more than 350,000 visitors per year, and the Russell Fork attracts kayakers from Appalachia and beyond during fall dam releases.

The annual Most Endangered Rivers report highlights waterways that face imminent threats from environmentally damaging practices.

Read about the Russell Fork in the next issue of The Appalachian Voice, and learn more about this year’s list at www.americanrivers.org/endangered-rivers — Molly Moore

New Park, Scenic Loop Passed by Virginia Legislature

By Eliza Laubach

The Virginia legislature passed funding for a Clinch River State Park and designated a new scenic drive loop for the area in an effort to celebrate the natural beauty of the state’s southwest region. By press time, Gov. McAuliffe had not signed these items into law.

The Clinch River State Park would consist of parcels of land across several counties, including river access sites. The land purchases — sold by willing landowners — would be bolstered by more than \$3 million from the state budget. The Clinch River Valley Initiative, a collaborative effort of local, regional

and state partners, worked to develop the park as a foundation for economic development and environmental conservation in the biodiverse watershed.

In the same region, the Thomas Jefferson Scenic Byway Loop is expected to bring ecotourism to Scott and Wise counties. The route encompasses existing roads that pass through the Jefferson National Forest, the city of Norton and the Guest River Gorge, among other natural and man-made landmarks. Wise County Administrator Shannon Scott told the Bristol Herald-Courier that the loop could bring in tourists, create jobs and provide local recreation opportunities.

One-third of Southeastern Streams Contain Algal Toxin

In a study of 75 streams across the Southeast, the U.S. Geological Survey found that nearly 40 percent of the streams tested contained a toxin called microcystin. The toxin is produced by algae, and in high concentrations can cause “nausea, derma-

titis and, in severe cases, liver failure,” the report stated.

While no areas tested contained high levels of the toxin, further research is needed to assess possible risks to drinking water and aquatic ecosystems. — Elizabeth E. Payne

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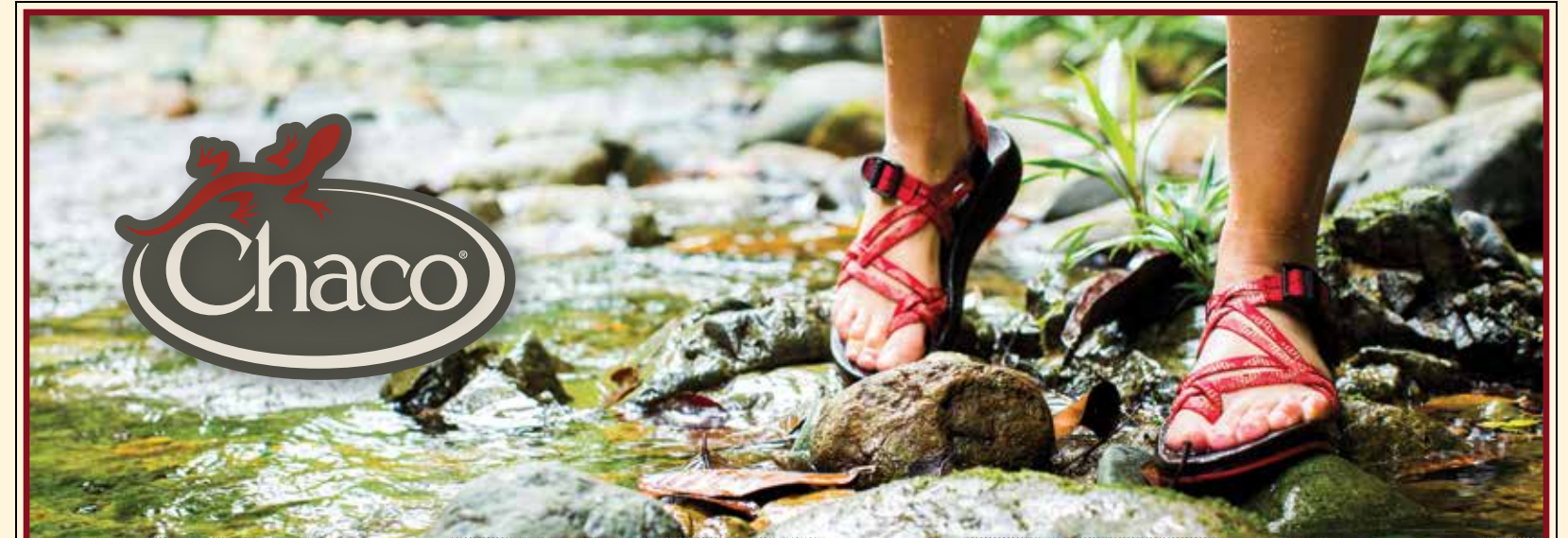
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


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FloydFest: Celebrating Music and Mountains

By Jamie Goodman

For the second year in a row, Appalachian Voices, the publisher of the Appalachian Voice, is teaming up with FloydFest to serve as the 2016 featured nonprofit and receive a portion of proceeds from the festival. The goal of the partnership is to encourage and promote stewardship of the Appalachian region, blending the joyous atmosphere of a music festival with opportunities to learn about environmental threats to the mountains and discover ways to get involved.

FloydFest is a five-day music festival held at the end of July each year just off the Blue Ridge Parkway near the picturesque town of Floyd, Va. The festival places an emphasis on family, art and celebration, and integrates non-musical offerings including outdoor activities such as disc golf and float trips, and workshops ranging from yoga to primitive tool-making. Organizers have also tapped a number of experts to lead the FloydX panel series on topics ranging from mountain music and beekeeping to mountaintop removal coal mining and other environmental issues.

Since the festival's inception in 2002, organizers have worked to protect the integrity of the mountain setting where it is held by incorporating a variety of green initiatives. Starting with the construction of the buildings — designed to match the hillside contours and minimize the cutting of trees — the festival's envi-

Green Team Stats
FROM FLOYDFEST 2015

- 74%** amount of festival trash diverted from landfill
- 8** tons of food composted
- 19.15** tons of glass and plastic recycled
- 2** tons of aluminum cans and other metal recycled
- 48,000** number of plastic bottles saved via onsite water refill stations
- 6,396** gallons of water consumed from the water refill stations
- 54,000** number of plastic cups saved via use of the Klean Kanteen stainless steel FloydFest cups
- 1,000** pounds of camping gear donated to be re-purposed for the homeless

ronmental ethos has grown to include a massive Green Team recycling program that requires more than 50 volunteers and staff to run. Nearly 74 percent of the festival's waste is kept out of the landfill, from the vendor veggie oil that is repurposed into biodiesel to the eight tons of compost generated by biodegradable trash. The festival also offers a special ticket deal which includes an HOV-EZ parking pass to encourage carpooling. (See inset for more Green Team facts).

Musical Roots
From FloydFest's inception, a fusion of Appalachian roots and world music has inspired the unique feel and sound of the festival. Each year, festi-

val organizers amass an eclectic mix of more than 100 artists to perform on the festival's nine different stages, with styles ranging from funk and Afrobeat to blues and bluegrass.

This year's lineup features such top acts as Gregg Allman, Bruce Hornsby, Nahko & Medicine for the People, Femi Kuti and Positive Force, The Wood Brothers and more (see list at right for a complete lineup). Local and regional bands are included in the mix as well. In addition to more well-known regional favorites like Nathaniel Rateliff and Anders Osborne, a special On-The-Rise competition — held in Roanoke, Va., throughout April and May — allows up-and-coming bands to play for a spot on stage during the main festival.

A juried selection of more than 70 artisans — including jewelers, potters, mad hatters, shoemakers, painters and candle makers — and gourmet regional food trucks and craft beer, cider, wine and kombucha vendors provide the necessities of festival life.

FloydFest and its parent company, Across-the-Way Productions, expanded in 2016, introducing a three-show Totally Rad Roanoke-Star City Concert Series in downtown Roanoke, Va., featuring Huey Lewis & The News on April 20, Blondie on May 12 and Brian Wilson on August 20.

For more details about the partnership, visit appvoices.org/floydfest.



- Gregg Allman • Warren Haynes' Ashes & Dust
 - Bruce Hornsby & the Noisemakers
 - Leftover Salmon • Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats • Railroad Earth
 - Nahko and Medicine for the People
 - Keller Williams with More Than A Little
 - Femi Kuti & Positive Force • Shakey Graves
 - The Wood Brothers • Greensky Bluegrass
 - Elephant Revival • Anders Osborne
 - Pimps of Joytime • Rich Robinson
 - Bombino • Monophonic • Otis Taylor Band
 - The Larry Keel Experience • Love Canon
 - Con Brio • The Legendary Shack Shakers
 - Head for the Hills • Liz Vice
 - Los Colognes • Selasee & the Fafa Family
 - Dave Eggar Trio • Monster Atlantic
 - Roosterfoot • Blue Mule • Look Homeward
 - The MidAtlantic • Bloodkin • Steepwater Band
 - Dead 27s • Mingo Fishtrap
 - Honey Island Swamp Band • Polyrythmics
 - The Congress • The Defibulators • Banditos
 - Caravan of Thieves • Dead Winter Carpenters
 - Dustbowl Revival • Keller & the Keels
 - T Sisters • Screaming Js • Marley Carroll
 - Higher Learning • TigermanWOAH!
 - These Wild Plains • Mallett Brothers
 - Cask Mouse • Cactus Attack
 - Moonshine District • Zoe Ravenwood
 - Dalton Dash • Grand Ole' Ditch
 - Blind Owl Band • Rob Nance & the Lost Souls
 - Mason Via • Cabin Creek • Party Liberation Front
- AND MORE TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON!

Naturalist's Notebook

Dance of the Timberdoodle: Meet The Elusive American Woodcock

By Charlotte Wray

Characterized by a long bill, short and stout stature, extravagant mating display and a nickname like timberdoodle, the American Woodcock would seem to be a bird that stands out. But that is not the case.

Well-camouflaged and motionless until up close, the American woodcock is actually very hard to find. Capturing the birds for research requires a good eye for potential woodcock habitat, as they rest in dense forest during the day to avoid predation and roost, feed and perform courtship displays in open fields at night, says Joe Moore, a graduate student at the University of Arkansas. Moore works with wildlife agencies and other organizations to track the birds and learn more about their migration habits.

"You can walk within a foot of a woodcock and they're not going to move," says Jesse Pope, executive director of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation in Avery County, N.C. "They're just sitting there, really still, that's their mechanism of survival.

They'll let a predator get within really close proximity before they fly."

Woodcocks are found throughout the year across eastern North America. The summer range of woodcock includes the northern Appalachians and the wintering range includes the southern Appalachians. States in central Appalachia are in the transition zone, providing habitat for breeding, wintering and migrating woodcock.

Pope has spotted the woodcock occasionally throughout the winter in western North Carolina.

In Appalachia, hens begin nesting in March, and lay eggs that hatch several weeks later, according to Pope.

This region also provides a stopover habitat for the species, which is a place for birds to rest and "refuel" during long migrations, according to Moore.

Many migration details are unknown due to the difficulty of locating individual birds multiple times throughout the annual cycle, but recent advancements in satellite transmitters now allow remote tracking of woodcock and allow researchers such as Moore to follow movements of individual birds and begin to unravel some of the mysteries of the migratory patterns of this cryptic bird.

American woodcocks require two very specific habitats. During the day, woodcocks raise their young, avoid predators and find an abundance of earthworms to eat in thickets with wet grounds. In the evening, woodcocks move to open clearcuts, farmland or pastures.

"It's kind of interesting that a lot of the conservation for woodcocks involves clear-cutting, which is normally not what you think of when you think conserva-



The American woodcock lives across eastern North America. It can be recognized by its long beak and distinctive call, but its camouflaged coloring makes it hard to find. Photo by Rodney Campbell

tion project," Moore says.

Range-wide population surveys since the 1960s have shown that the American woodcock population is gradually declining at a rate of about 1 percent every year, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

This decline over several decades is primarily due to the overall loss of forested area due to urbanization in eastern North America and the conversion of early successional forests to mature forests, according to Moore.

These open areas — known as singing grounds — are required to provide ample space for male woodcock mating displays.

These mating rituals, which take

place at either dusk or dawn in winter or early spring, begin with a repetitive buzzing call by the male woodcock, called a peent. The male bird then hovers and flies in a circle 100 to 300 feet above the ground. Following its descent, the woodcock continues its mating song. Each of these processes lasts about four or five minutes, but can be repeated for over half an hour.

The woodcock may sing and dance in the fields, but the forests that they depend on for food are one of the most endangered habitat types in the Southern Appalachians, according to Pope.

"They're one of those species that are tied to a really fragile and rare habitat," Pope says.

American Woodcock Facts:

- They are short-legged, plump shorebirds, 10 to 12 inches long and 5 inches tall, with a broad wingspan of about 20 inches.
- A long and flexible bill ranging from 2.5 to 2.75 inches allows them to capture creatures deep in the soil
- The mating ritual, called a "sky dance," involves the male performing chirps, or peents, which transitions into a marvelous flying display where the males use their wings to create various repetitive twittering noises in their attempts to attract a mate.
- Nicknames for the woodcock include timberdoodle, night partridge, big-eye, bogsucker and mudbat.
- The American woodcock is a popular game bird.
- The woodcock's signature sounds and dance moves have made it a bit of a YouTube sensation. Find video links in the online version at appvoices.org/timberdoodle

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The Power of Cooperation

Co-ops help put solar on residential rooftops

By Dan Radmacher

When Joy Loving decided to add solar power to her Rockingham County, Va., home in the spring of 2012, she did it the hard way. She taught herself what she could, then found an installer through a Google search. A full six months later, she turned on her system. Since then, she's been working to make the process a lot easier — and cheaper — for others.

"My decision wasn't driven by economics," Loving says. "I'm 70 years old, and without state tax incentives or any kind of discount, my payback period for this system will be very long. I might live long enough to reap the economic benefits. I might not. But my primary motivation was about reducing my carbon footprint."

When she first began looking into solar, Loving thought there might be some sort of program through her electric utility, or state policies that would help. Instead, she found obstacles. Unlike some other states, Virginia mostly forbids power purchase agreements, a solar financing model in which companies own the solar arrays they install on homes and charge homeowners for the power they use.

The state also limits the size of systems residents can build on their homes and caps the power generated by all Virginia residential arrays combined

to no more than one percent of all power generated in the state. It also allows utilities to charge minimum monthly fees to solar users — even if the resident generates more power for the grid than they use.

Loving says all the obstacles to solar put in place by the state and politically powerful utilities irritated her. "It got my back up," she says. "The freedom to choose my energy source was very important to me. I believe that I need to be a good steward of God's creation, and this is one thing I can do positively to be a good steward."

Even after her own system was installed, Loving kept reading and learning. "There was just nothing like the thrill of not having an electric bill," she says. "I kind of got obsessive about it, checking the system and the power meter and watching what the system could do. After six or seven months, I thought 'this is something that other people should know about.'"

She reached out to local/regional environmental group Climate Action of the Valley in Harrisonburg, Va. Leaders there ended up connecting with Virginia Solar United Neighborhoods, also known as VA SUN, which is a branch of the Community Power Network in Washington, D.C.



Augusta Solar Co-op member and homeowner Keith Shank stands with a representative of the solar installation company in front of his new solar array (top). Photo courtesy VA SUN Joy Loving's rooftop solar installation in Rockingham County, Va. Photo courtesy of Joy Loving

and more informed about solar."

VA SUN helps solar co-op groups — usually collections of neighbors — by providing the experience and expertise it takes to get organized, research installers, issue a request for proposals, evaluate and negotiate with installers, and then see the process all the way through the installation and hookups.

Ben Delman, communications manager for Community Power Network, says the various state SUN groups in Appalachia — DC SUN, VA SUN, WV SUN and MD SUN — have helped around 1,000 people go solar across the region, with about a third of those in Virginia. According to Delman, when individuals organize into co-ops, they gain expertise and save money by negotiating bulk purchases.

In addition to helping co-ops, Community Power Network has also supported groups that use the "Solarize" model, in which the installer is pre-selected rather than picked based on competitive bids.

After discussions with VASUN, the Harrisonburg-based Climate Action of the Valley decided to sponsor a co-op in Harrisonburg and Rockbridge County. They asked Loving to lead it.

"Unfortunately, I didn't know about co-ops when I installed [my system]," she says. "All the co-ops exploding around the state are like seeds — making people more aware

According to Delman, the co-op experience generally works like this: "We start work with one or two local organizations — some sort of community group that can guide the process and begin recruiting co-op members." The group holds a number of informational meetings during the recruitment phase. "We take them through understanding solar energy, the different ways to finance and help them understand the co-op process," he says.

"In some ways, it's the same as doing any home construction project," Delman continues, "But how great would it be if you're adding a deck or renovating a bathroom to be able to go through that with a group of people all doing the same thing?"

A critical mass of people interested in installing solar is necessary to move forward to the next step of actually reaching out to contractors. "Once a group gets to about 25 or 30 members, we work with them to issue a [request for proposal] to installers," Delman says. Co-op members make the final decision. "We help group members review the bids, but it's up to the selection committee to choose."

Carl Droms, a member of Climate Action of the Valley, was a member of the Harrisonburg co-op's selection committee. At that stage, there were 70 or 80 interested households, and about

Continued on next page

Solar Cooperatives

Continued from previous page

a dozen co-op members on the selection committee. "We all had different ideas about what was important and how to weigh the factors," he says. "The price per watt — which included everything: panels, wiring, inverters, the electrical work, installation — was important, but there were other factors. Could the installer handle this number of installations and get things done in a reasonable time? Would they use local labor? What kind of guarantee did they offer? How much work had they done in the past?"

"In the end, we were pretty well agreed," Droms says. "Everybody felt we made the right decision."

The discount for a co-op member over an individual trying to buy their own solar power system is generally around 20 percent, Delman says. "It's a good deal for the installers, as well," he says. "To have a base of interested customers who are educated about solar is really good."

Once an installer is selected, individuals in the co-op get a site inspection and, eventually, a contract for a system

tailored to their individual needs at the agreed-to price. Co-op members aren't obligated to buy unless they sign that contract.

Droms is very happy with the system he and his partner installed on their home. "Our total bill for the last year has been about \$130 — and that includes a \$9.50 a month fee just to stay connected to the grid," he says. "We were really pleased with the co-op. If we had to negotiate everything ourselves, it would have been a lot more complicated."

There's not much of a downside to working through a co-op, says Cory Chase, a Tucker County, W. Va., resident who helped organize a co-op in his area. "WV SUN offers a lot of technical assistance that really helps. It might be a little more bureaucratic and slower than going on your own, but we'll be able to help each other out, buy material in bulk and get a competitive bid," he says.

According to WV SUN Program Director Karan Ireland, her organization has helped co-ops launch in the towns



BUILDING BETTER SPONSORED BY Sunny Day Homes Inc. Techniques to Reduce Home Heat Loss

Last issue we discussed how to increase a home's energy efficiency by improving the thermal envelope, which is the barrier separating conditioned air from unconditioned. Improving this barrier can reduce the three types of heat loss: radiation, conduction and convection. In this installment, we will continue on the topic of tightening the thermal envelope by using the example of a high-performance home currently under construction.

This project pictured at right uses several different approaches to tighten the thermal envelope. The wall system combines foam board attached to structural sheathing to eliminate the majority of conductive heat loss, which occurs when an exterior stud is in direct contact with the sheathing, thus providing a direct path for heat to escape.

Another approach used in this house is the application of a layer of foil-faced foam board on the ceiling with taped seams and sealed edges. This foil-faced foam board addresses all three types of heat loss. Taping and sealing the joints and edges

dramatically reduces warm air escaping through convective heat loss, while the foam board adds a conductive barrier and the foil face reflects back radiant heat loss.

Every home presents its own challenges and opportunities to improve comfort, energy efficiency and indoor air quality levels. By improving a home's thermal envelope, a homeowner can directly participate in transitioning to a cleaner energy future, while enjoying a more satisfying place to live.



Foil-faced foam boards can reduce heat loss in new or existing homes.

ABOUT SUNNY DAY HOMES: Sunny Day homes is a small, family-owned general contracting firm that has been incorporated since 1997. They built the first certified green home in North Carolina's High Country in 2008 and have been advocating for non-toxic, environmentally responsible and energy-efficient building ever since. Call/text (828) 964-3419 or visit sunnydayhomesinc.com

Co-ops accepting new members:

Richmond, Va.: Deadline April 30; For information, contact VA Sun Program Director Aaron Sutch, aaron@vasun.org

Tucker, Randolph and Upshur counties, W.Va.: No deadline yet
Monroe County, W.Va.: No deadline yet. For information, contact WV Sun Program Director Karan Ireland, karan@wvsun.org



Residents attend an info session for the Massanutten Regional Solar Co-op. Photo courtesy VA SUN

of Morgantown and Wheeling, and in Kanawha, Tucker and Monroe counties. "A co-op is like Solar 101," she says. "It can be cumbersome if you're trying to figure out everything by yourself. With the co-op, you work with friends and neighbors to learn about how to go solar."

Like Loving, Ireland believes co-ops help create solar ambassadors. "As people understand the benefits of solar, they become invested in the policy as well," she says. "Because they're already working together, that creates a network of solar advocates."

And solar advocates are needed, especially in states like Virginia and West Virginia where fossil fuel interests hold so much sway, says Mark Hanson, president of the Renewable Energy and Electric Vehicle Association, a do-

it-yourself club in Roanoke, Va., that helps members with solar installations and other renewable energy projects.

"Our legislators don't push the power companies to do the right thing," Hanson says. "Power companies just see solar as a way for people not to pay for electricity. When it comes to legislators, the power companies pretty much get their way."

Joy Loving says the co-op model is serving its purpose. "It has increased awareness of solar and gotten more press coverage," she says. "People have heard about it. People see the panels going up and they talk. Co-ops will bring more people into the solar fold."

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Service, Music and Community in Southern West Virginia

Appalachian South Folklife Center builds on influential past

By Peter Slavin

The Appalachian South Folklife Center in southern West Virginia has weathered many storms over the past half century, yet continues to provide help to residents in need, education for youth, and a safe harbor for activists. Despite early denunciations of its founder's political views, government harassment and a fire, the center has become a gathering point for locals and visitors drawn to the center's beautiful setting, music and opportunities for service.

Since 1965, the center's staff and volunteers have worked to improve the lives of Appalachia's people and to instill in them pride in their heritage, while also giving others an appreciation of the region. The center has focused on educating young people and dispatching volunteers to assist local residents who need home repairs. The center has also opened its doors to people needing a place to meet, from miners for democracy and opponents of a high-voltage power line to campaigners against mountaintop removal coal mining.

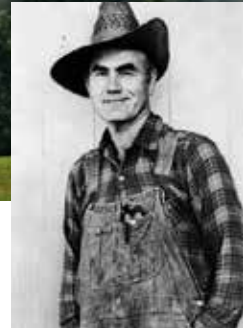
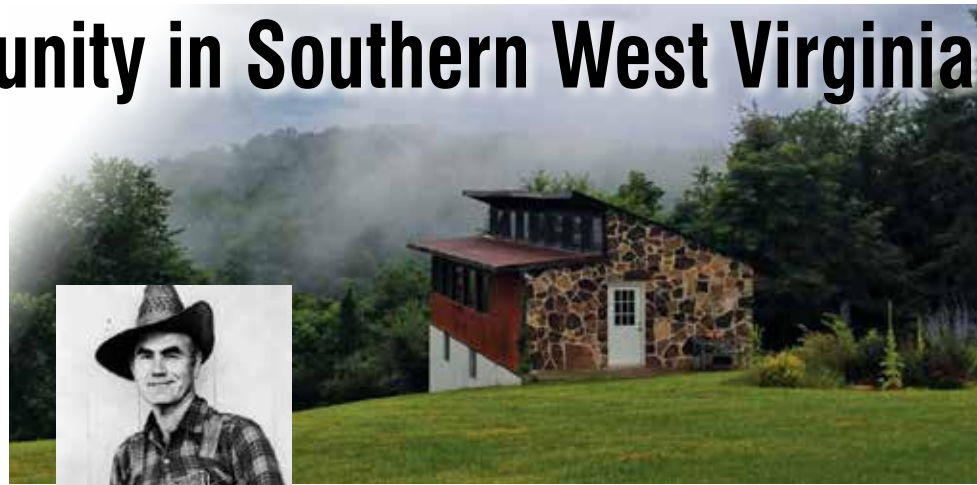
The center is also known for its music festivals, ranging from the early Mountain Music Festivals that drew thousands to hear both traditional and contemporary folk songs to the more recent CultureFest, an annual event featuring world music. Pete Seeger, Merle Travis and Hazel Dickens as well as local singer-songwriters and garage bands have played on its stage. "Hardly any event doesn't include

music," says Mary "Meno" Griffith, who first came to the center in 1969. "Even after long meetings about serious issues, someone gets out an instrument and starts singing." Music, Griffith says, is central to the center's mission, because it brings people together and "helps us understand our history."

Still, if music has been the soundtrack of the center's life, making Appalachians aware of their history and culture and its value has been its central purpose.

The Folklife Center was the creation of Don West, a north Georgia farmer and champion of displaced mountain people, tenant farmers and union workers, and his wife Connie, a portrait painter. A man of many talents, Don was a leading poet in his day, and a respected educator, political activist, labor organizer and minister.

According to "The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936," West was "wanted dead or alive" for defending a black man who was on trial for leading a hunger march, and fled Atlanta under a pile of sacks in a car. Because of his civil rights activism, the Ku Klux Klan once burned down his home. In 1932, he cofounded the historic Highlander Folk School in Tennessee — now the Highlander Research and Education Center — a critical training ground for the labor and civil rights movements. Almost



Don West, at left, was raised on a North Georgia mountain farm in an area that had flown the Union flag during the Civil War and nonconformity was part of his heritage. Above, the chapel is used for spiritual gatherings, weddings, meetings and concerts. Photos courtesy Appalachian South Folklife Center

forgotten today, Don West attained near-legendary status in the South in the era before the civil rights movement.

The Wests saved enough while teaching for a decade in Baltimore to purchase a 600-acre farm in the beautiful hills north of Princeton, W.Va., so they could build the new Appalachian South Folklife Center in 1965. Over the years, the United Church of Christ, Quakers and other progressive churches have been the center's primary financial supporters; many individuals have also donated.

In the beginning, Don West used produce from a big garden on the farm to help feed those at the center, and raised and sold hay. The farm is no more, having been divided among his children at his death in 1992. The center now occupies 63 acres.

In the early years, people in the community who were facing tough times, including striking coal miners, knew they could go to the center for help. "If they needed a meal, there was always food there and always something to do to earn it," says BobMac MacMillam, who has worked at the center on and off since 1973.

Griffith tells one story about Don West's influence on someone who became a noted writer. "Jeff Biggers was hitchhiking ... just young and figuring what he's doing in world. Don West picks him up, takes him to the Folklife Center, feeds him, charms him with stories, and becomes a mentor to him. And you hear that story over and over again [from] people who are associated with the Folklife Center."

From 1968 to 2000, the center sponsored a residential summer camp, bringing in as many as 50 disadvantaged 11- to 16-year-old boys and girls from all over Appalachia. The aim was for the kids to enlarge their horizons, learn about the region's history and heritage, counter stereotypes they faced, and boost their self-esteem. The kids learned about coal mining, black lung, organizing and unions as well as how outside domination of the region negatively affected Appalachians. Many campers came back year after year.

Because of Don West's politics, some

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Folklife Center

Continued from previous page

people in the community felt animosity toward the center. For years, the Wests took part in political demonstrations and marches, and sometimes they brought along summer campers, says former executive director David Stanley.

So when the dining and meeting hall, long the heart of the center, burned to the ground in the early 1970s, some believed the fire might have been set. But the cause was never determined, and the hall was soon rebuilt.

Stanley says in the late 1980s two men came to his office and demanded to know where the center got its financing. They said they were from the state, but displayed no badges. He refused to produce his records and told them to leave. A year or two later, he says, Internal Revenue Service agents "took Don West out of his house ... at 2-3 in the morning, took him down to Princeton to interrogate him about his finances."

Stanley calls the incidents government harassment.

Every year 400 to 500 out-of-state high school students come for a week to participate in service work, assisting local communities while learning about Appalachia's culture and history. In groups of 15 to 20, the students work on home repairs for low-income, elderly and disabled people — painting, building a new porch or deck, replacing rotting bathroom floors and the like.

"You have to prepare yourself for



Between 400 and 500 people come to do service work each year for up to 40 families. Photos courtesy Appalachian South Folklife Center



Several women in the back-to-the-land movement founded the Learning Day Camp in 1985. The camp continues today and reportedly has a powerful impact on children. Photos by Brandi Massey

it," says Briddy Blankenship, a previous executive director. "It's very humbling to see how some people are living."

The groups only work for five days and don't do electrical work or plumbing, says Blankenship, "but we can still do a lot to make a difference in someone's life."

Not only the homeowners benefit, notes Griffith. The young volunteers — mostly middle class suburban kids — have their eyes opened to how some people have to live, she says, and learn they can "give back for the blessings in their lives." The kids also make their own meals and sleep in dormitories. In the evening they learn about Appalachian life, from mining history to pottery and square dancing. Some groups have been coming back for 15 years.

The center also offers a unique day camp program for one week each summer for at-risk children ages four to 12. Families pay what they can afford. The campers and their counselors — junior high, high school and college students, virtually all of whom attended the camp as children — go together to classes such as science, math, journaling and yoga taught by certified teachers. The counselors provide powerful role models, says assistant director Sarah Justice.

"Everything we do is hands-on," Justice says. "Kids leave each day with things they've made in arts and crafts."

"Many kids live way down a dirt road with the closest neighbor maybe being two miles away," she notes. For them, she says, the chance to socialize with kids their age is special.

Citing the slurs against Appalachians on TV and other media, Justice says the kids' camp combats the "cultural shame associated with being from Appalachia." The camp celebrates their West Virginia heritage.

For Griffith, being part of a com-

munity of like-minded progressives at the center who put their values into practice through programs like the kids' camp means a great deal.

She has served on the board for 28 years. "It's like the Folklife Center is my church," she observes.

But it wasn't through a program that the center touched local resident Doris Irwin's life. She first went there to listen to music as a 20-year-old high school dropout who had felt the sting of Appalachian stereotypes growing up. After she started spending time at the center, she came to see her culture and herself differently. Irwin learned "you don't have to be limited by your past," and saw that education "was not something out of my reach."

She wound up going to college, earning two degrees and having a long career as a registered nurse and social worker.

Over the decades, the center has changed, too. In recent years local people have started holding their weddings, celebrations of life, family reunions, church services, and Boy and Girl Scout meetings at the facility, notes Nancy Aldridge, co-director of the Learning Day Camp. Such events, together with the day camp, she says, have given the center "a respectable



place" in the community. Irwin's children also attended the center's residential camp and are among the many people whom the center has benefited.

For more information about the Appalachian South Folklife Center, visit folklifecenter.org

Upcoming Events at the Folklife Center

Earth Day, April 23, 11 a.m. - 11 p.m. — Music, arts, and activism, including an herb walk, panel on local foods, sustainable building demonstration, yoga, drum circles, live music, open mic and jam session. Free. Call: (304) 466-0626 Visit: earthdaywv.com

Culturefest, Sept. 8-11 — World music & arts festival with four stages for music and dance, unusual workshops, children's activities, roaming dancers acting out stories, and on-site camping. \$10/day; \$50/weekend. Call: (304) 320-8833 Visit: culturefestwv.com

Want to bring a group on a service trip? Email Laura Lavernia at appalachianfolklifecenter@gmail.com



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CLIMBING THE HIGHLANDS FROM THE GROUND UP

BY ELIZABETH E. PAYNE

Julia Stailer completes a challenging climb called "Wall Street" in the Picnic Area of Grayson Highlands. Photo by Dan Brayack

Throughout Appalachia, roadways, trails and mountainsides are dotted with rocky outcrops that are as distinctive to the region as the rhododendron and mountain laurel that surround them. While many people may think that these rocks would be fun to climb, few have the skill to actually do it.

For decades, these rocky formations have attracted the attention of those that do.

Three styles of climbing are particularly popular in the highlands. The first is bouldering, in which a climber remains relatively near the ground while traversing established routes using no more equipment than their climbing shoes and a bag of chalk. And because the climber is rarely more than 18 feet off the ground, no ropes or safety harnesses are used. Instead, a landing pad and spotters protect against injury in the event of a fall.



Aaron Parlier is focused on the "Eye of the Narwal," one of many climbs along the Listening Rock Trail at Grayson Highlands. Photo by Sarene Cullen

The other two styles dominate in areas with cliff faces rather than boulder fields. In both, climbers use rope and safety harnesses secured to anchors positioned in the rock along the route, which protects them from falling to the ground. In sport climbing, the anchors are permanently fixed, and in traditional climbing, climbers place their own anchors as they climb.

Appalachia offers climbers challenging routes in beautiful settings, and the region's geology invites climbers of all styles and abilities. And in return, the sport of climbing provides an opportunity for economic development for areas around these rock formations.

BUILDING NEW ROUTES AND PARTNERSHIPS

At Grayson Highlands State Park, located in Grayson County in southwest Virginia, climbers have access to over 1,000 established boulder routes and work in partnership with the park's rangers and staff to maintain the area.

In large part, this is the result of one man's hard work and love of climbing.

Aaron Parlier now lives in Boone, N.C., where he co-founded the Center 45 Climbing and Fitness gym, but he is a native of Southwest Virginia who spent years collaborating with park rangers and staff to develop the boulder fields of Grayson Highlands into a popular destination for climbers.

As a young child, Parlier was introduced to climbing by his uncle, and his love of the sport was so strong that he built a small climbing wall in Afghanistan while serving with the U.S. Army — the wall was later destroyed by Taliban forces. After his deployment, he returned to Appalachia eager to get back outside and climb on rocks.

Grayson Highlands quickly drew his attention because it had so many large boulders that no one seemed to be climbing. As Parlier explored the park's

rock formations, his uncle again provided encouragement, prompting him to keep records of the routes he climbed. Several years later, that bit of encouragement developed into Parlier's published guidebook of 349 climbs at Grayson Highlands.

But more than documenting existing climbs, Parlier also worked to establish new routes and to design and build trails that sustainably provided access to them. This work was done during the three summers he served with the AmeriCorps State Park Interpretive Program.

Parlier has also studied plants and geology in order to be a responsible steward of the areas where he develops climbs. So, when an endangered flower, the Roan Mountain bluet, was unexpectedly discovered on a single rock face at Grayson, that boulder was immediately closed to climbers.

Through his collaboration with park staff, Parlier was able to expand access for climbers, while limiting their environmental impact on the park by only designating routes where no fragile species would be affected and by building and maintaining access trails. Each Memorial Day weekend he organizes volunteers to maintain the trails he designed.

Now, Grayson Highlands regularly attracts climbers from across the nation, and it is increasingly popular with international climbers, too.

Parlier credits the success of the project to the park's staff, who are always available and have welcomed this collaboration with the climbing community. "The boulders are there," he says. "So, it's basically just facilitating access to the boulders, by means of a trail. As long as there's folks there that can help allow it and manage the impact — in terms of travel and plant life — it can be a really great equilibrium."

CASHING IN ON CLIMBING

Another popular climbing destination is the Red River Gorge, located near Slade in eastern Kentucky. Nestled in the Daniel Boone National Forest, this area is best known for its majestic cliff

faces, which attract rope climbers. A few bouldering routes can be found there as well.

According to an Eastern Kentucky University study released in March, climbers visiting the Red River Gorge contribute \$3.6 million annually to the economies of the six Kentucky counties along this geologic feature — Estill, Lee, Mennifee, Owsley, Powell and Wolfe counties, some of which are among the poorest in the country.

The Access Fund, a nonprofit organization that seeks to expand access to climbing areas, co-sponsored the study and voiced support for the findings. "Climbing is an economic boon for communities across the country," Zachary Lesch-Huie, southeast regional director for Access Fund, said in a press release. "Especially in economically distressed regions like southeastern Kentucky, it's critical that [stakeholders] review this study and recognize the benefits climbing and other forms of outdoor recreation bring to local businesses and families. Responsibly opening more climbing areas on public land can help support a strong, sustainable and growing outdoor tourism economy."

The town of Norton, Va., is also poised to expand its economic base by attracting climbers to the region. A strong supporter of climbing in Norton is Brad Mathisen, who is working with forest service staff in the Jefferson National Forest to carefully develop both rope climbing and bouldering routes in the Guest River Gorge.

Mathisen, who grew up in Pennsylvania and Ohio, now calls Southwest Virginia home and has been a climber for about ten years. In addition to potentially bringing economic opportunities to the region, he sees climbing as a way to change opinions about how the region's natural resources are used.

Recently, when discussing his climbing gear with a curious bystander, the man noticed Mathisen didn't have an accent and asked him why he wanted to live in Norton. "I was able to say that really, as a climber, the climbing resources around here are amazing. And having the Guest

River Gorge 15 minutes from our house, I love living here," Mathisen says. "[Climbing] does provide unique opportunities to... open people's mind maybe to different ways of using the natural resources that exist here."

Norton town officials are particularly eager to develop bouldering at the Flag Rock Recreational Area, following an agreement to expand access reached by the city of Norton, the Access Fund and the Southwest Virginia Climbers Coalition, which was founded by Mathisen and Parlier in 2014. "We think tourism is a great opportunity, not only for the city but for the region," Norton City Manager Fred Ramey told the Bristol Herald Courier in February 2015. "We think opportunities like this can be part of the whole tourism component."

GAINING AND LOSING ACCESS

When developing climbing in any area, securing access to the boulders can require a delicate dance between climbers, landowners and federal and state agencies. But perhaps nowhere in Appalachia has access defined the character of a climbing community as much as in Boone, N.C.

During the 1990s, climbers lost access to some of that area's most popular climbing spots, either when they were put off limits out of environmental concern or when they were destroyed by bulldozers to make room for residential developments.

According to Parlier, this history has left its mark on the local climbing community, which continues to be fiercely protective of the areas where they can climb. He believes that no guidebook exists for the Boone area out of concern that an influx of visitors could damage the climbing areas and result in more lost access. With more maintained trails, adequate parking to accommodate the larger numbers, and additional rangers and

staff to help manage the public lands, the situation may eventually change.

But for climbers serious enough to explore the available climbing through word-of-mouth and personal networks, the area has a lot to offer.

"The climbing [around Boone] is fantastic," says Dawn Davis, a college student who transferred to Appalachian State University because of the area's climbing. "When I moved here I didn't know anybody, not even one person, and I made so many friends through climbing, so many wonderful friends."

Like most climbers, Davis frequently climbs in gyms, but she says there's something special about climbing outside. "When you climb outside, and you're working really hard on something, you can have so many stressors in your life," she says. "But as soon as you get on the rock, they all go away, and all you can think about is the next move or getting on top of [the boulder]."

Davis is not alone in finding pleasure in the challenge of the rocks. Climbers come to Appalachia from around the country, and around the world, to explore the highlands one boulder at a time.



"Land Shark" is a short climb on a boulder in the Moonlight Area of Grayson, and Sheila Rahim is tackling it with style. Photo by Dan Brayack

REGIONAL CLIMBING AREAS

For more information about these and other places to climb, visit mountainproject.com

CHATTANOOGA There are many popular places to climb in and around the city of Chattanooga, Tenn. For bouldering, try Little Rock City and Rocktown. For rope climbing, try Foster Falls. And if it rains, the city also offers several indoor gyms. Visit outdoorchattanooga.com/land/rock-climbing

HIDDEN VALLEY This popular rope climbing area near Abingdon, Va., is once again accessible to climbers. Two years ago, the Access Fund and Carolina Climbers Coalition purchased 21 acres of prime terrain in order to preserve access for everyone. Visit carolinaclimbers.org/hidden-valley.html

NEW RIVER GORGE The National Parks Service boasts that there are more than 1,400 established climbing routes along the New River Gorge National River. These steep cliff faces near Fayetteville, W.Va., are not for beginners, but will reward the more experienced climber. Visit nps.gov/neri/planyourvisit/climbing.htm

RED RIVER GORGE The Red River Gorge is located in eastern Kentucky within the Daniel Boone National Forest. This gorge is particularly popular for its rope climbing, but there is also some bouldering. Both guides and guidebooks are available. Visit redrivergorge.com/climbing.html

RUMBLING BALD Now part of Chimney Rock State Park, these boulders near Asheville, N.C., are particularly popular during the fall and winter months. With expanding access and parking areas, the spot offers bouldering, rope climbing across skill levels. Visit bit.ly/1V8f5xA

From the Archives - Stewards of the Rock



The sport of bouldering was also covered in our Sept./Oct. 2010 issue, with a focus on expanding access to rocks and limiting the environmental impact to the area. Read this story and more at appvoices.org/voice20



What's Coming Down the Pipeline?

The race to replace coal with natural gas

By Elizabeth E. Payne

Fracked from the Marcellus and Utica Shale formations beneath Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio and West Virginia, a surplus of natural gas is now poised to surge into Virginia and North Carolina, bringing with it promises of a cheaper, “greener” future supported by a new and improved energy infrastructure.

But many citizens and economic experts are raising questions about just how “green” a fossil fuel can really be and how steep a toll — both financially and environmentally — its infrastructure will take.

As of 2008, the United States was criss-crossed by more than 305,000 miles of natural gas pipelines, and since then this figure has risen steadily. In central and southern Appalachia, a web of pipelines invades the landscape, linking the drilling wells from shale country to state and regional pipelines, storage facilities, power plants and coastal ports for export.

Prominent among these is the Transcontinental Pipeline, operated by Williams Companies. The Transco line extends more than 10,000 miles and stretches from south Texas to New York City.

But plans, sponsored by energy companies such as Dominion Resources and Duke Energy, are underway to stretch even more pipelines across the region. These pipelines would connect the Marcellus gas to new transport facilities and power plants in a web as intricate as that connecting the subsid-

iarities of the companies themselves.

Several proposed projects will extend and upgrade existing routes. Columbia Pipeline Group’s \$850 million WB XPress Project will add two new compressor stations, replace 26 miles of existing pipeline and add 2.9 miles of new line in Virginia and West Virginia. In March 2014, Williams announced a \$2.1 billion plan to expand the capacity of the Transco line and change the direction of the flow to carry Marcellus gas to customers in the Southeast and eventually to the Gulf Coast for export.

But in the last two years, two major new pipeline plans have been submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for approval. FERC, the federal agency that regulates the transmission of electricity, natural gas and oil, is responsible for evaluating and approving new pipeline proposals.

The first is the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a \$5.1 billion project by Dominion, Duke Energy, Piedmont Natural Gas and AGL Resources, which would construct a 564-mile pipeline stretching from West Virginia into Virginia and North Carolina. In January, the U.S. Forest Service rejected a portion of the route proposed to run through the Monongahela and George Washington National Forests out of concern for endangered species that reside there. A rerouted path was announced in February and continues through the regulatory process.



Citizens living along the routes of the proposed pipelines are worried about the risks, such as the damage caused by an explosion along the Transco line in 2008, near Appomattox, Va. Photo courtesy of Allegheny Blue-Ridge Alliance

Citizen opposition to the proposed pipelines is well-organized and far-reaching. In August 2015, groups from across the region joined in solidarity to take a stand to protect their communities. Photo courtesy of Yogaville Satchidananda Ashram

The second is the Mountain Valley Pipeline, a \$3.5 billion joint venture headed by EQT Midstream Partners, which plans to lay 301 miles of pipeline from West Virginia into Virginia.

Additionally, Williams is considering an Appalachian Connector Project, which would also construct a new pipeline from West Virginia into Virginia. No proposed route or cost for this project has been announced.

Environmental Impacts

In 2015, the Obama administration announced the Clean Power Plan to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere by the nation’s coal-fired power plants.

Ironically, this act that was designed in part to reduce the effects of climate change, is being used as justification for the switch to natural gas. The plan limits carbon dioxide emissions — the largest source of domestic heat-trapping greenhouse gases and a significant byproduct of burning coal for electricity — but it does not govern methane, the second largest source of greenhouse gases and a significant byproduct of natural gas extraction and combustion.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the negative impact of methane on climate change is more than 25 times greater than that of carbon dioxide.

According to Glen Besa, director of the Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club, a report the organization released earlier this year found “that greenhouse gas pollution from the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines would be almost twice the total climate-changing emissions from existing power plants

Natural Gas Infrastructure Webinar

May 3, 2-3 p.m.: Appalachian Voices will host a panel discussion about the environmental, financial and personal costs of the proposed pipeline projects. Free. Visit appvoices.org/webinars

and other stationary sources in Virginia.”

And according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the potential environmental hazards linked to natural gas are significant and include air, water and noise pollution; methane leaks and explosions; and human-induced earthquakes.

Citizen Action

Concerned by this looming threat, residents in counties along the proposed routes have organized in opposition to the new construction project in groups such as Friends of Augusta, Preserve Monroe and Yogaville Environmental Solutions. Other groups, such as the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, form coalitions between organizations. Still others, such as Appalachian Mountain Advocates, Appalachian Voices, the publisher of The Appalachian Voice, and the Southern Environmental Law Center advocate and litigate on their behalf.

Through this network, concerned citizens of the region are educating themselves and their neighbors about the risks of the pipelines and are working together to oppose them.

Roberta “Bert” Bondurant lives in Roanoke County, Va., along the proposed route of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. She is a member of Preserve Roanoke and serves on the county’s Pipeline Advisory Committee.

One of her many concerns is the effect the pipeline’s construction — with its blasting and clear-cutting across steep mountain slopes and wetlands — would have on the county’s drinking water through erosion and disruption of streams and rivers. “MVP proposes to do a clear-cut, a cross cut, which is the simplest and crudest form of construction across Roanoke River, down on the southwest side of Poor Mountain about a mile and a tenth upstream of Roanoke County’s reservoir,” Bondurant says. “Roanoke County pumps water from the Roanoke River into its reservoir, and so what you’re talking about

continued on next page

Natural Gas

Continued from previous page

is that this is upwards of 50 percent of Roanoke County’s drinking water.”

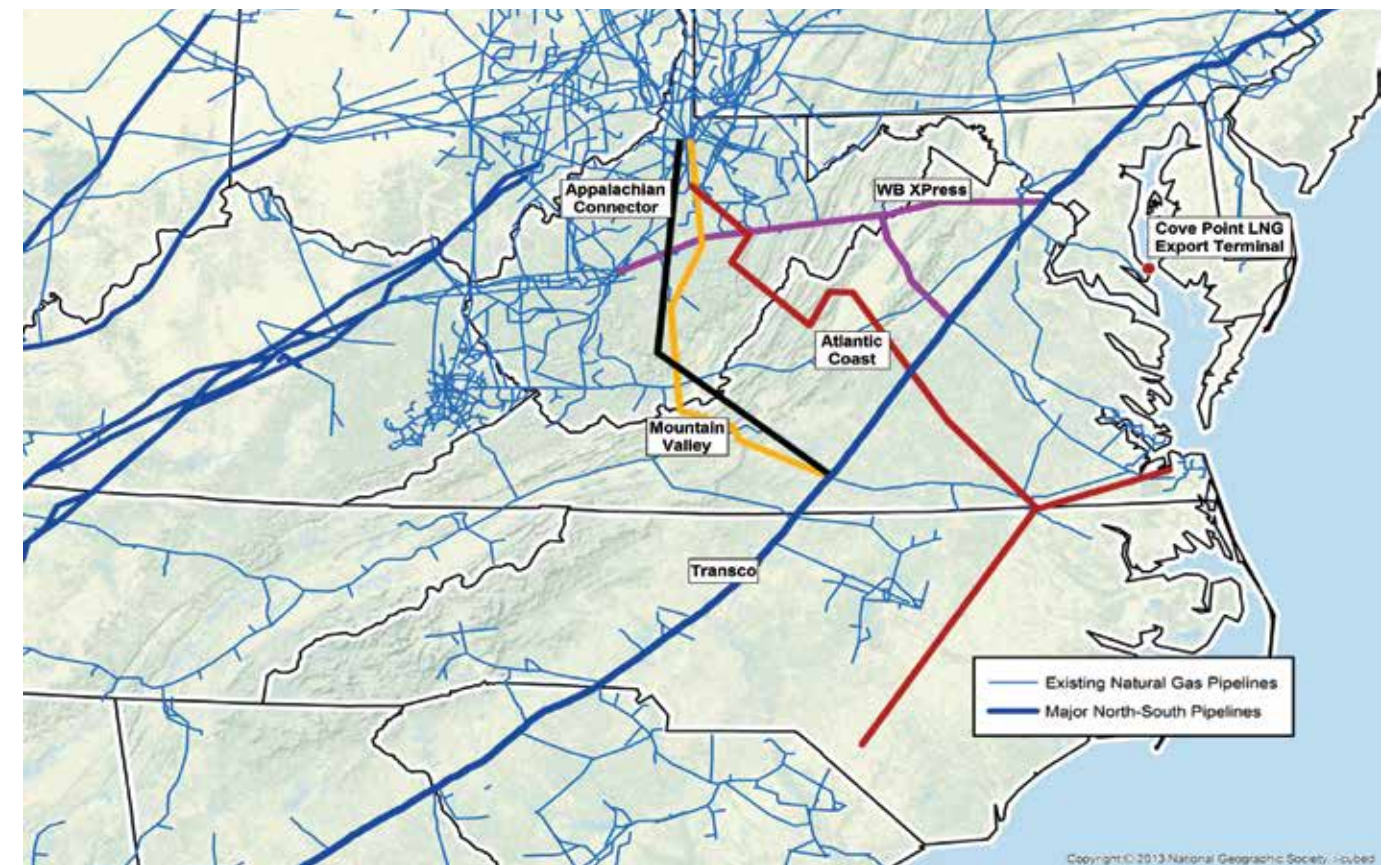
Charlene “Chad” Oba is co-chair of Friends of Buckingham, a citizen group opposing the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. One of Oba’s main concerns is the impact a proposed compressor station would have on her health and quality of life and that of her neighbors.

Compressor stations are positioned at intervals along a pipeline to pressurize the natural gas and provide energy to transmit the gas. According to the Roanoke Times, Dominion Transmission Inc. — senior partner in Atlantic Coast Pipeline LLC — purchased 65 acres of land in August 2015 for \$2.5 million. The parcel is near the intersection of the Transco line and proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline and would allow a connection between the two.

Oba is concerned about the air and noise pollution from the compressor. She describes the neighborhood where the compressor would go as largely older and African-American. “They’re a lot of elderly people, a lot of people who already have bad health,” she says. “So, there are a lot of vulnerable people that are greatly at risk.”

She has been served legal notice for refusing to give Dominion permission to survey her land. “The taking of private property for corporate profit is wrong,” Oba says. “It puts our health at risk. It puts our property value at risk.”

Vicki Wheaton lives in Nelson County along the proposed route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and wants to



Central and southern Appalachia are covered by a network of existing pipelines, shown above in blue lines. Plans are underway to add several major pipelines to this web, shown in different colored lines. Not shown are the compressor stations and power plants across the region. Map by Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition

stop the pipeline’s construction. Wheaton is an active member of Friends of Nelson County. She is encouraging the county to adopt higher floodplain standards regarding critical infrastructure and hazardous materials because they meet the federal requirements.

If adopted and enforced, these higher standards could be used by the county to block the construction of new infrastructure, such as the pipelines. “These higher standards would protect Nelson County residents,” she wrote in an email.

Economic Impacts

In February, a team from Key-Log

Economics LLC presented the findings of a study commissioned by five citizen groups representing four counties along the route of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, including Friends of Nelson County and Friends of Buckingham, Virginia.

Spencer Phillips, an ecological economist and principal at Key-Log, co-authored the study “Economic Costs of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline,” which is designed to serve as an model for the type of analysis FERC should undertake before signing off on either of the pipelines. In the study, Phillips and his team found that residents would carry a tremendous cost burden, including loss of property value, estimated at between \$72.7 and \$141.2 million, and annual costs, such as the resulting lost property tax revenue and ecotourism, estimated at between \$96.0 and \$109.1 million per year.

Following the Money

Thomas Hadwin, a resident of *continued on next page*

Coal Export Market Evaporates

By Brian Sewell

Up until 2012, the coal industry was optimistic about the outlook for U.S. exports. A record high amount of coal was shipped from American ports that year — twice as much as just three years prior.

Global demand soared as China, the world’s largest coal consumer, rapidly urbanized, and as India, the world’s third-largest coal importer, electrified far-flung rural areas. American coal even played a role in powering countries in Europe and South America.

Stateside though, slumping demand, power plant closures and competition from natural gas and renewables cast dark clouds

over coal’s future. To some experts, the sunny forecast abroad was the industry’s only hope.

“The future of the U.S. coal industry is at stake,” Richard Morse, an energy consultant, told The New York Times in 2013. “It is fair to say that a resuscitation of the industry has to come overseas.”

But the surge in exports was short-lived.

An Unequal Impact

In recent years, proposed export terminals in the Pacific Northwest turned the conversation westward. Producers in Wyoming’s Powder River Basin are desperate for greater access to international markets, but opponents of new export capacity have economics on their side.

In 2013, six terminals were planned in Oregon and Washington. All but two are now off the table.

For central Appalachian producers,

proximity to rail and ports along the East Coast have encouraged companies to cater to an increasingly volatile global market.

Wyoming, the nation’s largest coal producer, exported around 1 percent of its coal in 2011. West Virginia, the second largest producer, exported 27 percent. And while total U.S. exports fell 23 percent in 2015, the drop was 10 percent steeper at terminals along the Virginia coast, which primarily ship central Appalachian coal.

The Ghost of Growth

In 2011, the nation’s three largest coal companies bet billions of dollars on future demand for steelmaking metallurgical coal, a primarily Appalachian product that fetches a much higher price than coal burned in electric power plants. Alpha Natural Resources, Arch Coal and Peabody Energy each acquired companies with large metallurgical

reserves to capture their share of the market. Two months before Alpha Natural Resources acquired the central Appalachian-focused Massey Energy to become the leading producer of metallurgical coal in the United States, JPMorgan Chase forecast the price for the high-quality coal to increase by 50 percent in 2012.

Instead, it plunged. China’s feverish economic growth had driven up prices. When it broke, so did the market. According to a February 2016 study by the economic analysis firm Rhodium Group, 93 percent of the decline in the industry’s revenue between 2011 and 2014 was due to a drop in the consumption and cost of metallurgical coal.

The market shift still haunts the companies today. Alpha and Arch are both in bankruptcy, while Peabody teeters on the edge unable to recover from the collapse.

Natural Gas

Continued from previous page

Waynesboro, Va., is a member of Friends of the Central Shenandoah who spent many years working in the electric and gas utility business in Michigan and New York state. He is skeptical of the need for more pipelines and sees far more promise in energy efficiency efforts. "By far the cheapest way of getting more electricity is to not use it at all," he says.

For Hadwin, the development of the Marcellus Shale began with profit-seekers and easy credit following the collapse of the housing market in 2007 and 2008. "All these drillers are in there chasing this high price for natural gas with cheap money," he says.

But then the price for natural gas fell dramatically, in part due to oversupply, and the economics changed.

For the second quarter of 2015, the Houston Chronicle reports that "U.S. shale drillers now spend the vast majority of their operation cash flow paying off the debt they took out to expand their drilling." According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration,



This construction corridor is wide enough to accommodate a 12-inch pipe adjacent to a 6-inch pipe. The corridor for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Mountain Valley Pipeline will be much wider in order to fit pipes 42-inches in diameter. Photo courtesy of Dominion Pipeline Monitoring Coalition

that figure is 83 percent.

"More gas is being produced because these guys [the drillers] couldn't afford not to produce it," Hadwin says. "They've got all this cheap debt, but they have to pay the interest on it, they have to keep servicing the debt." This adds to the surplus and continues to deflate the cost of the gas.

The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis is preparing a study of the "finances of the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines in the context of the larger buildout of pipeline infrastructure from the Marcellus and Utica region," Cathy Kunkel, energy

analyst for the institute, wrote in an email.

The study, co-authored by Kunkel and Director of Finance Tom Sanzillo, will investigate whether too many pipelines are being built, how they are being paid for and whether FERC's review process is effective at preventing pipeline overbuilding.

The study is expected in late April and was commissioned in part by Appalachian Voices.

Unnecessary Expansion

In a report released in February, the U.S. Department of Energy concluded that pipeline capacity added since 2007 to accommodate increased shale production is "likely to reduce the need for future pipeline infrastructure" and that "higher utilization of existing interstate natural gas pipeline infrastructure will reduce the need for new pipelines."

In other words, the department doesn't forecast a need for significant pipeline expansions of the sort being proposed. And a study out of University of Texas at Austin predicts that the four main accumulations of gas beneath the Marcellus Shale could peak as early as 2020 and then begin to decline.

Yet in September 2014, Dominion announced a \$3.8 billion plan to convert the Cove Point LNG Terminal in Maryland, which was originally built in the 1970s as an import facility, to an export facility. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, it is the only approved natural gas export facility on the East Coast. And it "is connected to Dominion Transmission's interstate pipeline, as well as to other interstate pipelines that have access to the growing natural gas supplies in the region," according to the company's description.

Power plants are also being adapt-

ed, based on the expectation of cheap natural gas. Duke Energy's Western Carolinas Modernization plan, for example, that will cost nearly \$1 billion and will require "two 280-megawatt natural gas-fired combined-cycle power plants [that] will be located at the current Asheville coal plant site."

Citizen and environmental groups have fought successfully to reduce the scale of this project. But if it goes forward, it may be redundant from day one. In February, officials from Columbia Energy told the Citizen-Times that they could sell Duke Energy electricity from their existing natural gas power station in Gaston, S.C. They can supply enough to make the Asheville plants unnecessary.

Moving forward

A study released by the Union of Concerned Scientists in March 2015 describes a place for natural gas in the nation's energy future but warns against an over-reliance on gas. "As the nation moves away from coal, setting course toward a diverse supply of low-carbon power sources — made up primarily of renewable energy and energy efficiency with a balanced role for natural gas — is far preferable to a wholesale switch to natural gas," the study reported.

Expanded energy efficiency and renewable energy policies would be in the best interest of consumers. But according to one of their applications to FERC, the Atlantic Coast Pipeline partners anticipate a sizable profit from this construction project — in financial jargon, they foresee a 15 percent pretax return on their investment. "So, they're getting a huge rate of return in today's marketplace," Hadwin says.

And with profits like that, it would be hard for these investors to walk away.

Industrial Hemp Offers Hope to Appalachia's Farmers and Environment

Age-old crop could help lead to economic diversity in Appalachia

By Michael M. Barrick

As the result of a new law that takes effect on July 1, Virginia farmers will soon be able to grow hemp for industrial purposes — albeit with restrictions.

Even though the law is new, the crop is not. Industrial hemp has been grown around the world for centuries, offering thousands of uses, none of which involve "getting high."

In fact, according to Chase Milner, the Shenandoah Valley regional director for the Virginia Industrial Hemp Coalition, "Industrial hemp has been grown by human civilization for at least 12,000 years for fiber, food, and now recently bio-fuels."

He noted that a 1619 Virginia law required farmers to grow hemp, a critical component of sailcloth, textiles and rope, and three of the Founding Fathers grew hemp on their Virginia estates. Ben Franklin owned a mill that made paper from the plant, and the Declaration of Independence was drafted on hemp paper.

Still, Virginia's new law has its limitations, Milner explained. "Currently, under the federal Agricultural Act of 2014, the only lawful purpose for which industrial hemp may be grown is for research conducted by an institute of higher education or a state department of agriculture."

Before industrial hemp gains widespread acceptance, policy makers need to understand the difference between the crop and marijuana. The most significant difference is the level of tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, which is the chemical that gives marijuana users their "buzz." Industrial hemp

contains very low levels of THC — about 0.3 percent — while marijuana can contain up to 20 percent.

Ecological Benefits

According to Mike Manypenny, a former three-term member of the West Virginia House of Delegates who championed industrial hemp while serving in the legislature, the environment would benefit from fully legalized industrial hemp. A farmer, he has been granted a provisional license to grow the crop this year for research.

"Here in West Virginia and across Appalachia, we are inundated with environmental damage caused by the extraction industries. Coal mining has left unimaginable environmental damage to our soils, water and air across our once pristine landscapes," Manypenny wrote in an email. "We can use industrial hemp to help remediate those soils through bioremediation, where the plant takes up the metals and toxins left behind from the mining and processing of coal or other industrial practices. This in turn can reduce the amounts of metals and toxins leaching into our streams, rivers and into our aquifers." However, researchers acknowledge that since information regarding the effects of toxins on industrial hemp is incomplete, any such use of the plant would require that it be disposed of in a special manner, likely consistent with any disposal requirements for the toxin being absorbed by the plant.



The Virginia Industrial Hemp Coalition's leadership team (top) at a conference on industrial and medical cannabis in Morgantown, W.Va., in March 2016. Photo courtesy of Chase Milner. A postcard of hemp fields at the turn of the 20th century (above). Image courtesy of University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center.

Ryan Huish, an assistant professor of biology at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, agreed that the crop can be environmentally friendly. "Hemp requires little to no chemical input to grow well, thus avoiding the use of pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers," he stated. "It also has the potential of reducing the need to harvest trees for pulp and building materials, thus preserving more of our forests."

Milner described how hemp also sequesters carbon in a way that enhances soil quality while reducing levels of climate-disrupting carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The crop is also a nutritious food source. "Hempseed provide a remarkable plant based protein diet for human, livestock, and wildlife consumption," he added.

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The Legal Status of Hemp in the U.S. & Appalachia

By Michael M. Barrick

Producing and cultivating industrial hemp has been nearly impossible in the United States for roughly 80 years, when the U.S. Congress passed the Marihuana Tax Stamp Act of 1937 placed an extremely high tax on industrial hemp, making it unprofitable. Though that law was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1969, Congress responded in 1970 with passage of the Controlled Substances Act. It listed marijuana as a Schedule 1 substance — meaning that it is considered among the most harmful of drugs. At the time, industrial hemp was not distinguished from marijuana.

That changed two years ago, when President Obama signed the Agricultural Act of 2014, which allows universities and state agriculture departments to cultivate industrial hemp for limited purposes. Emboldened by this evolution, several states in Appalachia have loosened their own laws and are now looking to industrial hemp as a way to promote economic diversification and environmental preservation, especially in the rich earth that nurtures the farmlands of the region.

Virginia recently enacted legislation allowing farmers to grow the plant. West Virginia law allows the cultivation of industrial hemp with up to one percent THC, issues licenses to growers and even provides legal protection against prosecution under marijuana criminal codes. Maryland law permits a person to "plant, grow, harvest, possess, process, sell and buy industrial hemp."

In Kentucky, a five-year research and licensing program is overseen by the University of Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station. Established in early 2014, there are five projects across the state, including one project to determine whether industrial hemp could be used to remediate tainted soil.

In North Carolina, a law took effect in October 2015 that recognizes the potential importance of industrial hemp and established a commission to create and regulate an industrial hemp program. It also established licensure and reporting procedures and distinguishes hemp from marijuana. Yet the commission has not been funded by the General Assembly.

In Tennessee, however, applications are being accepted for the 2016 growing season by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. The law there, passed in 2014, is similar to the one in North Carolina in that it distinguishes industrial hemp from marijuana and established oversight through the Department of Agriculture.

In summary, no state in Appalachia allows the production and cultivation of industrial hemp without some sort of governmental oversight and control, but acceptance of the crop is growing.



The first legal Kentucky hemp crop was grown at a University of Kentucky research farm in August 2014. Photo courtesy Chase Milner

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Appalachia's Political Landscape

RECLAIMing Central Appalachia

Federal efforts could boost local economies, repair environmental damages

By Molly Moore

A rare bipartisan proposal aims to tackle two pressing issues related to the flailing coal industry — the need for new economic opportunities in central Appalachia and repairing environmental damage from decades of mining.

In March, nine grassroots advocates from Appalachia traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with congressional representatives and staff from the White House and federal agencies. The week's events were coordinated by The Alliance For Appalachia, a coalition of 15 environmental and community organizations including Appalachian Voices, the publisher of this newspaper.

The top priority was to inform regional legislators about the RECLAIM Act — a bill that intends to breathe new life into struggling central Appalachian economies while remediating land and water polluted by decades-old abandoned mines.

Congressional Cooperation

In February of this year, Rep. Hal Rogers, a Republican from eastern Kentucky, introduced the RECLAIM Act with the support of congressmen from both parties — Rep. Morgan Griffith (R-VA), Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA), Rep. Evan Jenkins (R-WV) and Rep. Matt Cartwright (D-PA). The RECLAIM Act would accelerate payments from the existing federal Abandoned Mine Lands fund, dispersing \$1 billion over five years to projects that would reclaim

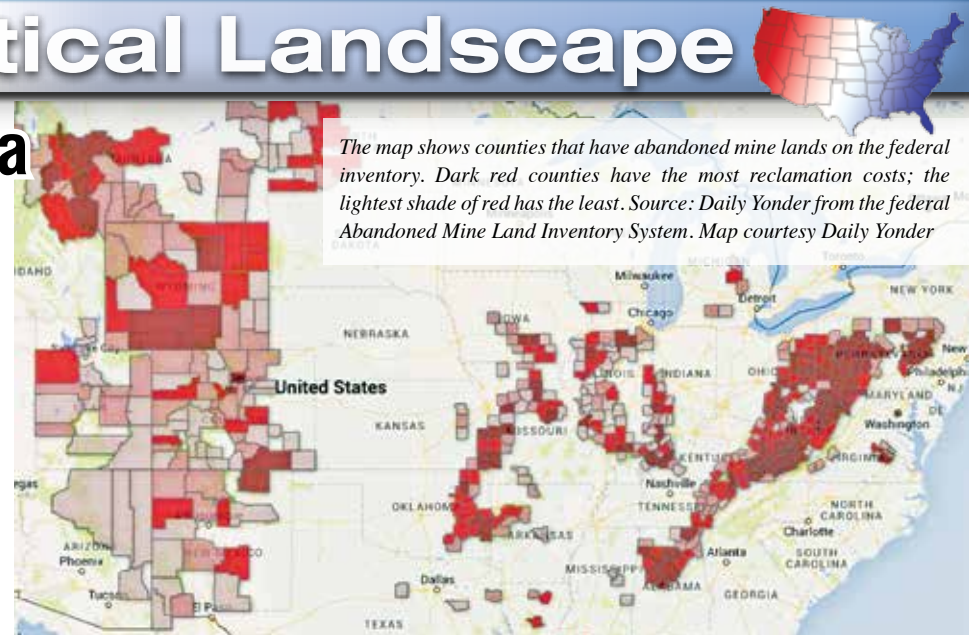
former mining sites while boosting local economic development.

Jack Kennedy, clerk of Circuit Court for Wise County and Norton, Va., and a former member of the Virginia General Assembly, says that the RECLAIM Act could lead to solar utility projects on abandoned mines and other endeavors.

"The RECLAIM Act passage would provide Appalachian community jobs immediately working to ameliorate brownfield real estate into a productive state for commercial or agricultural or other productive purposes over a period of time," he wrote in an email.

The bill's support from legislators like Rogers and Griffith — staunch opponents of environmental regulation, which they allege is responsible for Appalachia's poor coal market — signals a willingness to cooperate with the administration to provide economic and community development in areas that have depended on the coal industry.

Under the RECLAIM Act, \$1 billion from the federal Abandoned Mine Lands fund would be directed to qualifying states and tribes over a five-year period starting in 2017. The AML fund was established in 1977 to restore land and water contaminated by coal mines that were abandoned before the federal surface mining law took effect that year. The AML program is funded by a per-ton fee on coal production, and the money is distributed based on a state or tribe's current



coal production rather than the amount of damaged land and water.

Presently, the AML fund holds \$2.5 billion that is not dedicated toward specific projects, though the interest helps support a pension fund for roughly 100,000 retired union miners. This \$2.5 billion was intended as a reserve fund for states to use after 2021, when the AML program is set to expire — the RECLAIM Act would expedite the disbursement of \$1 billion from that pot.

According to a July 2015 report by the AML Policy Priorities Group, directing \$200 million annually to abandoned mine lands projects for five years would bring national economic benefits of 3,117 jobs and contribute close to \$500 million to the United States economy. The researchers, affiliated with Appalachian Citizens' Law Center and The Alliance for Appalachia, estimated that central Appalachia would see about 35 percent of those benefits. They called for allocating the \$1 billion in a way that differs from the RECLAIM Act by also considering economic distress. Such a formula would further boost the benefits for the area.

Even enacting RECLAIM with the current formula could be a powerful catalyst. "By expanding the scope of the AML program to consider economic benefits, Rogers and his colleagues have introduced a forward-thinking solution to one of the biggest challenges facing our region today," Kennedy wrote in a March op-ed in the Richmond Times-Dispatch. "The fact that the bill continues to gain bipartisan support is noteworthy and speaks to the urgent need for creative approaches to the economic woes of our coal regions."

Lawmakers incorporated some of the president's plan in their one-year federal budget for 2016 including a proposal by Rogers to direct \$90 million in AML funding to projects with economic potential in Pennsylvania, Kentucky and West Virginia, the three states with the highest remaining costs for cleaning up

Community Support

The premise of the RECLAIM bill is based on one of the components of the president's POWER-Plus Plan. The plan was first introduced as part of the president's 2016 budget proposal and was reintroduced for the 2017 budget.

POWER-Plus received a warm welcome from local governments and community groups in the region, many of which were already working to diversify the historically coal-dependent economy. Twenty-eight local governments and organizations passed resolutions supporting the economic revitalization package, including 12 entities in Rogers' home district.

Among those were the Benham Town Council and the Benham Power Board, a municipally owned utility. In early 2016, Carl Shoupe, a retired coal miner in Harlan County, Ky., and member of the Benham Power Board, wrote to Rogers and asked the congressman to help secure the funding needed to implement the POWER-Plus Plan. Citing the local declarations of support, he wrote, "As the resolutions say, we believe our transition should be one that celebrates culture; invests in communities; generates good, stable and meaningful jobs; is just and equitable; and protects and restores the land, air and water."

continued on next page

RECLAIMing

Continued from previous page

abandoned mines.

As of early April, the RECLAIM Act — which would go a step further with its \$1 billion allocation — had an equal number of Republican and Democratic co-sponsors. As the bill picks up more backers, a number of regional stakeholders are paying attention to how the bill is structured, and how the federal funds would be distributed.

"The Alliance [for Appalachia] is working to ensure that a strong public engagement process is included in RECLAIM," Economic Transition Coordinator Lyndsay Tarus wrote in an email. "If the intent of the legislation is to boost economic transition, then communities most in need of the funding need their voices heard."

During their March trip to Washington, D.C., the Alliance representatives also spoke with federal agency staff about the need for reliable oversight of clean water regulations, including a strong Stream Protection Rule to protect waterways from mining damage.

"The Alliance understands that meaningful and sustainable economic transition is just not possible when the basic necessity of clean water isn't available," Tarus states.

A POWERful Big Picture

The expedited release of abandoned mine lands dollars is one piece of a broader effort to assist central Appalachia and other communities around the country experiencing economic hardships due to coal's decline.

In addition to the abandoned mine

lands proposal, President Obama's POWER-Plus Plan would strengthen the healthcare and pension plans for approximately 100,000 retired coal miners and their families. The Miners Protection Act, a bill to enact the pension change, is currently in the Senate. The POWER-Plus Plan also calls for two new tax credits for power plants that use carbon-capture technology.

Another core component of the plan is the proposed Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization initiative, which would grant \$75 million in economic development funding to the region. These funds would provide more support for former coal workers through programs such as the Appalachian Regional Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program. An additional \$5 million to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Program would also clean up contaminated lands that have economic potential in formerly coal-dependent communities.

This POWER funding would help these agencies provide workforce training and bolster economic developments such as broadband access to attract new business.

In fall 2015, the Obama administration announced what it called a "down payment" on the plan — nearly \$15 million in grants to kick-start some of these initiatives. So far, the grants have been allocated to strengthen Kentucky's local food supply chain, bring agriculture to reclaimed mines in West Virginia, provide job training in fields such as technology and local food, develop community-specific economic diversification plans, create a



Representatives of The Alliance For Appalachia during a March trip to Washington, D.C.

substance abuse treatment center, and help new and existing industries capitalize on an expanding broadband network. Read more at right.

Kennedy waxes enthusiastically about the prospect for economic revitalization embodied in the RECLAIM Act and the POWER-Plus Plan. "Restoring Appalachian opportunity is essential," he states. "We need to be among the first providing multiple 20 to 80 megawatts of small commercial-scale solar utility farms to learn and culturally accept the energy transition underway in our nation and around the globe."

"Change is hard, but it is the only constant even for us in the more isolated mountains," he continues. "We must adapt, improvise and overcome multiple challenges."

As legislators, agency administrators and regional advocates work to pass these various federal economic proposals, one of the challenges for local supporters will be to make sure citizen input and priorities are reflected in the implementation of these programs.

"The key thing is citizen involvement," says Mary Love, a Kentucky

Grants Power Area Projects

► In southeast Kentucky, the POWER Initiative provided funding for the nonprofit media institution Appalshop to work with Southeast Community & Technical College and ten local employers to develop a one-year certificate program in technology. The three-track program would offer classes geared towards web coding, graphic and web design, and network infrastructure and security services. According to Ada Smith, Appalshop's institutional development director, a formal certificate in technology would provide "a marked signifier to others that this person is interested, available and ready to work." Smith hopes that courses will begin in fall 2017, and is optimistic that the program could be replicated at other community colleges.

► The Southern Appalachian Labor School in Robson, W.Va., received a planning grant to evaluate how both abandoned and reclaimed surface mines in the area might be used to provide economic benefits. "Right now we're going to try to scope post-mining sites in the county, see what's available, do a solar site analysis and see if it's feasible to put in a solar farm," says Director John David. The team will be looking at issues such as grid connectivity and cost, in addition to considering other projects like orchards and a senior living complex.

► The organization Friends of Southwest Virginia received a POWER Initiative grant to advance ongoing tourism, recreation and entrepreneurship projects. Among the endeavors is a new ecological education center near the Guest River that will serve as both an educational and entrepreneurial hub. Another project will improve riverfront access from the New River to five downtown centers in Giles County. In Wise County, local tourism partners plan to create a visitors center in Norton to provide information about the region's assets.

resident and member of The Alliance For Appalachia's federal strategy team who met with legislators about the RECLAIM Act. "They have to show that they have citizen involvement in deciding what projects to fund. You can bet that we'll be all over that."

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114 TH CONGRESS: Below are recent congressional bills and amendments on environmental issues and how central and southern Appalachian representatives voted. To see other recent votes, or for congressional representatives outside of the five-state area, visit congress.gov. ● = pro-environment vote ✗ = anti-environment vote ○ = no vote	Kentucky		Tennessee			North Carolina		Virginia		West Virginia						
HOUSE	T. Massie (R) KY-04	H. Rogers (R) KY-05	A. Barr (R) KY-06	P. Roe (R) TN-01	J. Duncan (R) TN-02	F. Fleischman (R) TN-03	S. Desjarlais (R) TN-04	V. Foxx (R) NC-05	P. McHenry (R) NC-10	M. Meadows (R) NC-11	R. Hurt (R) VA-05	B. Goodlatte (R) VA-06	M. Griffith (R) VA-09	D. McKinley (R) WV-01	A. Mooney (R) WV-02	E. Jenkins (R) WV-03
H.R.2406 , the Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act, would limit public involvement in National Wildlife Refuge and other land management decisions, increase access to hunting and fishing, and could lead to road development in wilderness areas. 242 AYES 161 NOES 30 NV PASSED	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
H.R.3797 , the Satisfying Energy Needs and Saving the Environment Act, would weaken existing federal emissions limits from power plants that burn coal waste. 231 AYES 183 NOES 19 NV PASSED	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
SENATE	Note: Senate legislation needs 60 votes to pass															
S.Amendment 3023 to S.2012 , the Energy Policy Modernization Act, would limit the president's ability to declare new national monuments. 47 YEA 48 NAY 5 NV FAILED	✗	✗	●	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	●	●	✗	✗	✗	✗
S.Amendment 3115 to S.2012 , the Energy Policy Modernization Act, would establish a standard requiring electricity and natural gas suppliers to increase their rate of energy efficiency between 2017 and 2040. 43 YEA 52 NAY 5 NV FAILED	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	●	●	✗	✗	✗	✗
S.Amendment 3176 to S.2012 , the Energy Policy Modernization Act, would phase out tax incentives for fossil fuels on the same schedule that tax credits for wind facilities are set to diminish. 45 YEA 50 NAY 5 NV FAILED	✗	✗	●	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	●	●	✗	✗	✗	✗

States Eye Cuts to Mine Safety, Coal Taxes in Effort to Revive Industry

By Brian Sewell

In Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia, high-profile legislation related to mine safety laws and coal taxation policies is showing how far Appalachian lawmakers will go in attempts to sustain the ailing industry.

On April 1, West Virginia Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin signed into law legislation that rolls back a requirement that coal companies provide private rescue teams in the event of a mine disaster, a measure enacted following the Sago Mine explosion in 2006 that killed 12.

The bill, which would also relax fines for not immediately reporting major incidents like fires or explosions, was passed before the state Office of Miners' Health, Safety and Training was able to analyze its potential impact. Nor was the bill's economic benefit to the industry calculated.

"I don't know that that created or saved one job," state Senate Minority Leader Jeff Kessler, a Democrat running for governor who opposed the bill, told the Charleston Gazette-Mail after the Senate vote. "Once again, just because the industry is asking for it, we're will-

ing to roll over and give it to them."

The West Virginia Senate passed a bill in March to reduce the state's coal severance tax from the current rate of 5 percent to 2 percent. Severance tax revenues, which provide critical funds for counties and the state budget, are already in steep decline, contributing to budget cuts and public employee layoffs.

According to the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, which opposed the bill, the tax cut would cost the state \$159 million and local governments \$11.6 million annually while doing little to fight the forces making central Appalachian coal uncompetitive. The bill was shelved by the state House of Delegates.

Both efforts were backed by the West Virginia Coal Association.

In Kentucky, the severance tax pie is shrinking even faster than in West Virginia. Tax revenue in January 2016 was \$8.9 million, compared to \$20.5 million during the same month in 2011. Multiple bills have been introduced this session to direct a larger portion of the dwindling coal tax revenue to eastern Kentucky counties most affected by coal's decline. But bickering over how to

divide the total \$44 million in severance taxes in the state budget has dimmed the prospect for reform.

Kentucky legislators are also at odds on mine safety. In March, the Senate easily passed measures to eliminate state safety inspections of coal mines — leaving the role to federal inspectors — and end mandatory safety training for mine foremen.

Sen. Robin Webb, a former coal miner, was appalled. "I cannot ever have the blood of my brothers and sisters on my hands as a state policymaker, and I cannot support this measure," she told her colleagues.

The measure is supported by the administration of first-term Gov. Matt Bevin and the Kentucky Coal Association.

In a recurring battle in Virginia, Gov. Terry McAuliffe vetoed House and Senate versions of a bill to extend state tax credits for the coal industry, which he described as "ineffective at creating or protecting economic activity or jobs."

Between 1988 and 2015, the coal industry claimed more than \$160 million under the Virginia credits. Over the same period, coal jobs in the state fell from 11,000 to less than 3,000.

Bankrupt Coal Companies Dodge Liabilities and Distribute Bonuses

By Brian Sewell

Whether hurtling toward bankruptcy or crafting plans to reemerge, major U.S. coal companies are grappling with their liabilities to restore sites after mining and their obligations to employees, past and present.

Alpha Natural Resources, which entered bankruptcy in August 2015, recently filed a plan in federal court to restructure as a leaner company "positioned to meet new market realities." If an effort to sell its most profitable assets goes as planned, Alpha claims it will be better able to focus on properly reclaiming its dozens of remaining mines — all of which are in central Appalachia.

But state and federal regulators are concerned that losing the cash flow from its "crown jewel assets" would leave Alpha a hobbled company un-

able to meet environmental cleanup requirements.

On March 28, Alpha's lawyers asked a judge's permission to break its contract with the United Mine Workers of America and remove an estimated \$872 million in benefit obligations to union miners from its balance sheet. Two months before, Alpha was allowed to set aside nearly \$12 million in bonuses for its top executives.

Similar to Alpha, Arch Coal approved \$8.8 million in bonuses for executives in January, three days before it declared bankruptcy. The company has until May 13 to submit its own restructuring plan.

At press time, Peabody Energy, the world's largest publicly traded coal company, was on the brink of bankruptcy with more than \$1 billion in mine reclamation liabilities.

Atlantic Ocean Spared From Oil Drilling

The Obama administration released its five-year plan for offshore oil drilling in March, announcing potential leases along the Gulf and Alaskan coasts but not the Atlantic Coast. The Department of Interior had proposed leasing a swath of the Atlantic coast, from Virginia through Georgia.

"When you factor in conflicts with national defense, economic activities such as fishing and tourism, and opposition from many local communities, it simply doesn't make sense to move forward with any lease sales [in the Atlantic] in the coming five years," said Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell in a press release. — Eliza Laubach

New research reveals mountaintop removal impacts on landscape

In the region of southern West Virginia where mountaintop removal occurs, the land is 40 percent flatter than it was forty years ago, a Duke University study shows. Published in January in Environmental Science and Technology, the study compared topographic data and assessed how changes in the landscape affect water quality. The scientists found a correlation between the total volume of displaced rock and concentration of pollutants. — Eliza Laubach

Hemp *Continued from page 17*

Economic Benefits

Huish observed, "the scientific name itself includes the Latin 'sativa,' meaning, 'cultivated,' emphasizing its eminence as a domestic crop." As West Virginia adjusts to having less employment from the shrinking coal industry, Milner and Manypenny both suggest that industrial hemp could serve as an economic engine to help fill the gap. "Appalachia offers one of the most pristine environments for growing industrial hemp," Manypenny said.

Milner stated, "The Hemp Industries Association has reviewed sales of clothing, auto parts, building materials and various other products derived by foreign-grown hemp, and estimates the total retail value of hemp products sold in the U.S. in 2014 to be at least \$620 million."

Hemp's Future

According to Milner, the full benefits of industrial hemp won't be realized until federal law is changed. "Congress remains the industry's greatest hurdle, as hemp still is defined as marijuana via the Controlled Substances Act," he wrote.

Yet, he remains hopeful. "For many, including me, hemp brings hope," Milner shared. "Hope for a planet that needs healing, hope for a more sustainable agrarian future, hope for more locally sourced foods, renewable fuels and fibers. Hope for health care products that do not pollute the environment and will lessen our use and impact of synthetic pesticides, insecticides, and petroleum products."

NC ranks second in solar growth in 2015, with big plans for 2016

In 2015, North Carolina ranked second in new solar installations with 1,134 megawatts of new installed capacity, driven by utility-scale projects, according to a report by GTM Research and the Solar Energy Industry Association. This is the second consecutive year the state was ranked second. North Carolina started the new year off strong, with the most solar capacity in advanced development in the nation as of mid-February, a report by SNL Financial shows. According to the report, this advancement was encouraged by the extension of a 35 percent state tax credit to 2017. — Eliza Laubach

Controversy Shrouds Coal Ash Cleanup

By Elizabeth E. Payne

In March, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality held a series of 15 public hearings across the state to solicit stakeholder comments on the classifications for the 33 coal ash impoundments located at Duke Energy's 14 coal-fired power plants.

These classifications — low, intermediate and high — are used by NCDEQ to assess the risk of each site and determine the timetable and minimum standards that the cleanup process will follow.

At the hearings, area citizens were able to speak with NCDEQ staff about their concerns with the cleanup process. Many urged the agency to rank their community as intermediate or high priority.

"We drank the water, ate the food in that soil," said Leslie Brewer, who raised her family near the Belews Steam Station coal ash pond in Danbury, N.C. "Please make this high priority, my children don't have another ten years to wait until this is cleaned up." Read more about the hearings on pg. 22.

These hearings were required by the state's Coal Ash Management Act, which also established the Coal Ash Management Commission to oversee the process amid an atmosphere of public distrust. Following legal challenges reaching the state's Supreme Court, Gov. Pat McCrory disbanded the nine-

member commission in mid-March.

The act tasked the commission with ensuring that NCDEQ's classifications accurately reflected the level of risk posed by each site, and allowed them 60 days to review and comment on the classifications. Whether a new commission will be appointed in time to provide oversight is unclear.

The same week that the commission was disbanded, staff members from the NCDEQ and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services lifted the do-not-drink warnings from households near coal ash ponds whose wells had been contaminated by hexavalent chromium and vanadium.

The agencies lifted the ban on water containing levels of hexavalent chromium exceeding the state standard of 0.07 parts per billion. Citing federal standards of 100 parts per billion for total chromium, Tom Reeder, the state's assistant secretary for the environment, argued that the previous standards had been overly cautious. There is no federal standard for hexavalent chromium, a carcinogen.

Duke Energy, which denies responsibility for the contamination, will soon stop providing bottled drinking water to the affected households.

In other news, two groups have dropped their complaints against Dominion Virginia Power's plan to release

U.S. using less energy, global carbon emissions hold steady

Total electricity sales decreased last year in the United States, according to the Energy Information Administration. The agency lists energy efficiency, whether through market-driven improvements or government standards, as a significant factor in lessened electricity demand despite growth in the number of households and commercial buildings.

Don Blankenship Sentenced

Following his conviction in federal court for conspiring to violate mine safety laws, the former CEO of Massey Energy was sentenced in April to one year in prison and a \$250,000 fine, the strictest penalties the court was able to impose.

While Blankenship's lawyers claimed that probation would be punishment enough, Assistant U.S. Attorney Steve Ruby told the judge that "If ever a case cried out for the maximum sentence, this is it."

The historic sentence was announced a day after the sixth anniversary of the Upper Big Branch mine explosion in West Virginia that killed 29 miners and led to a federal investigation, civil penalties and the criminal convictions of four other Massey officials.

Family members of Upper Big Branch victims welcomed the news, including Judy Jones Peterson, who lost her brother and who described Blankenship's courtroom apology as "too little, too late." — Brian Sewell

Partnership salvages VA solar project

A solar project denied by Virginia regulators last fall is moving forward due to an agreement between the state, Dominion Virginia Power and Microsoft. Through the public-private partnership, Dominion agreed to sell power generated by a 20-megawatt solar project in Remington, Va., to the state, which will then provide Microsoft with renewable energy credits to help the company meet its renewable energy goals. The project is still subject to regulatory approval, but could begin service in late 2017. — Brian Sewell

West Virginia bill shields businesses from citizen suits

Landowner rights groups and environmentalists say legislation passed by the West Virginia Senate would shield the oil and gas industry from "public nuisance" lawsuits filed by citizens due to lost property values or other negative impacts. Although the bill never passed the state House of Delegates, opponents worry that legislation to strip landowners rights and protect industry is likely to reappear during the next legislative session. — Brian Sewell

States Respond to Clean Power Plan Ruling

By Brian Sewell

A February decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the Clean Power Plan led some states to reevaluate the actions they've taken to comply with the federal limits on carbon emissions.

The Supreme Court's 5-4 decision was celebrated by the group of states and industry groups challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's plan and derided by environmental and public health groups that described it as a bump on the road to cleaner energy.

"This is a pause, and we are confident the Clean Power Plan and all of its benefits ultimately will be implemented across the nation," the Sierra Club's Chief Climate Counsel Joanne Spalding

wastewater from coal ash ponds at two of its power plants into the Quantico Creek, which feeds into the Potomac and James rivers. After Dominion announced that it would adopt stricter standards for treating the wastewater than were required by the Virginia DEQ, the Prince William County, Va., board of supervisors and the James River Association agreed to stop fighting the plan, according to the Bay Journal.

Other groups, including the Southern Environmental Law Center and the state of Maryland, will continue to appeal Dominion's discharge permit.

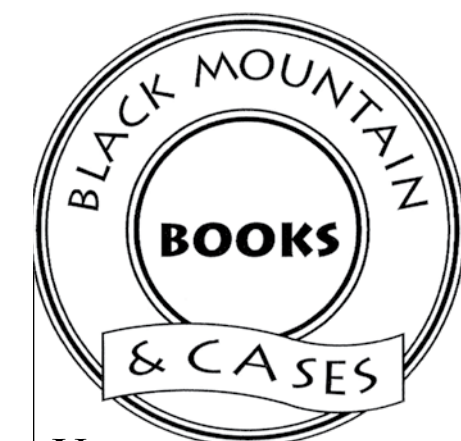
said in a statement.

The stay will remain in place until legal challenges to the Clean Power Plan are resolved. But some states, including Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland, continue to develop their plans to comply.

"We will stay on course and continue to develop the elements for a Virginia plan to reduce carbon emissions and stimulate our clean energy economy," Gov. Terry McAuliffe said.

States including North Carolina, Kentucky and West Virginia have put their compliance plans on hold, pledging to not devote resources to comply with regulations that may be overturned.

The U.S. Court of Appeals will hear arguments on the Clean Power Plan in June.



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Citizens Show Strength at NC Coal Ash Hearings

Throughout the month of March, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality held a series of public hearings to gather input on cleanup of the state's nearly 150 tons of coal ash.

The DEQ scheduled individual meetings for each of the state's 14 coal-fired power plants and their corresponding coal ash impoundments. At



each of the hearings, impacted residents, environmental groups and civil rights champions called upon the DEQ to consider all coal ash impoundments in the state as high or intermediate priority. Those classifications require excavation for cleanup instead of allowing the ash to remain in place with a plastic liner cap installed on top. Currently, the DEQ has ranked the coal ash sites into proposed high, intermediate and low categories, with nearly half of the facilities falling in the intermediate and low priority.

Appalachian Voices' North Carolina team worked tirelessly throughout January, February and March with partner groups and the A.C.T. Against Coal Ash coalition to inform residents about the



Hundreds of residents packed a series of hearings on coal ash cleanup in North Carolina during March. Our N.C. Field Coordinator Sarah Kellogg (left) worked tirelessly to inform residents and prepare comments to present at the hearings. Photos by Jimmy Davidson and Jamie Goodman

hearings. Thanks to those efforts, nearly all 14 meetings were full, with dozens of citizens providing testimony at each.

David Hairston, a resident near the Belews Creek Steam Station in Stokes County, lamented the fact that young people in the area are worried about future health impacts. "If your kids lived here, would it be low priority?" he asked the official.

At the Buck Steam Station meeting held in Salisbury, one resident discussed her concerns about allowing the coal ash impoundments to remain in place, stating that "If that dam were to break, my house would be the first to go."



Residents living adjacent to the coal facilities also detailed their concerns about water contamination, with some pointing to the state's Do Not Drink warnings they received last year which were controversially rescinded in early March, shortly after the hearings began.

The final ratings from DEQ are expected to be released May 18. A public comment period held in conjunction with the hearings closes on April 18. Learn more at appvoices.org/truth-about-coalash.

Response to Spill Leads to Action Against Coal Polluter

Pine Creek in Letcher County, Ky., is a small creek that flows through a hollow off Pine Mountain and into the North Fork of the Kentucky River. The point where Pine Creek and the Kentucky River meet is about five miles upstream of the municipal drinking water intake that serves Whitesburg, Ky., and the surrounding county.



Acid mine drainage from a coal mine flooded into Pine Creek in eastern Kentucky, killing wildlife and raising concerns over drinking water safety. Photo by Tarence Ray

When an auger mine operator drilled into an old underground mine at the head of Pine Creek on March 18, releasing a flood of acidic, orange-colored water into the creek, residents were concerned about the proximity of Pine Creek to the water intake. Our Appalachian Water Watch team was contacted by some of these concerned citizens, and was able to document the spill as it occurred in real-time. Photos of dead fish and turtles were posted to Facebook and Twitter, where they quickly went viral.

Due to public pressure from social media and citizens filing complaints, the state of Kentucky acted to control the spill, and filed three violations against the company, Hardshell Tipples. The state initially denied that the mine waste killed any wildlife, but eventu-

ally reversed its findings and issued an additional violation to the company. The state also compelled the company to commit to a fish-restocking plan for Pine Creek — a huge victory for water advocates and a sign that the state is aware of the public's concern.

While water and fish tissue samples are still being processed, the quick response of our team pushed the state to action and prevented the mine waste from affecting the county's municipal water system. Unfortunately, this is yet another example of the costs that communities near coal mines have to pay in terms of ecological, personal and financial health.



Virginians Call on McAuliffe for a Bold Clean Power Plan

Virginia residents gathered for a Day of Action on April 2 to remind Governor McAuliffe of his commitment to cut carbon and focus on renewable energy job creation for the Commonwealth. At events across the state, which took place in Bristol, Charlottesville, Richmond, Roanoke and other cities, residents spoke of the 157 percent increase of solar power jobs in Virginia since 2012, and how jobs in the field can help the economy of Southwest Virginia. Some citizens also attended to

stand up against fossil fuel projects like the two proposed natural gas pipelines that threaten the state (see more on page 14).

This spring, Governor McAuliffe has the opportunity to create a strong Clean Power Plan that would drive investments in proven clean energy sources, or he could allow Virginia to become more deeply dependent on fossil fuel for power. If you're from the state, ask your governor to do the right thing for all Virginians. Visit: cleanpowerva.org

Tracey Wright: Educator and "Everyday Person" Making a Difference

By Charlotte Wray

Tracey Wright isn't one to sit back and wait for change to happen — she strives to do all she can to advocate for environmental protection and inspire others to work for change.

Tracey lives in Cleveland, Tenn., with her husband Tommy and two daughters. She serves as assistant to the president for community relations and special programs at Cleveland Community College and also happens to serve as secretary on Appalachian Voices' Board of Directors.

Graduating from Middle Tennessee State University with a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's in educational leadership, Tracey quickly transitioned from teaching to working in higher education, first at MTSU and then Appalachian State University followed by Cleveland Community College.

While working with students in housing at MTSU, Tracey deepened her passion for people and for higher education.

"I think diversity is another form of sustainability," she says. "It's an important piece of the handiwork of our earth."

At Appalachian State in Boone, N.C., she served first as the director of multicultural student development and then as assistant vice chancellor for student development. During her time there, Tracey became involved with Appalachian Voices through a colleague, Bunk Spann, an educator, environmental advocate and board member with the organization.

Member Spotlight

Tracey says she was drawn to Appalachian Voices by "the important mission of the organization, the incredible work that's going on in terms of protecting our environment and being leaders, in terms of bringing about some needed legislative changes, as well as individual changes that must occur in order to protect this earth that we are made guardians of."

She joined the board of directors for the organization, becoming the secretary in fall 2015.

But her passion for the environment began during her childhood in Dixon, Tenn., helping her grandfather grow his traditional garden with tomatoes, potatoes, okra, green beans, corn and more. Tracey says her grandfather taught her to respect the earth and the environment.

"He was a person that I highly, highly respected," she says. "So from an early age, just having us out digging in the ground and planting gardens and talking to us about the different environmental impacts."

Tracey's passion for environmental protection expanded as she worked at Appalachian State.

"It's challenging, I think, to be at a place such as Appalachian State where our students and faculty and staff generally are very supportive of the environment and you're in such an amazing place to not get connected and be concerned about doing all you can," Tracey says. "Particularly in



terms of ... protecting and being a force to help stop mountaintop removal."

Though Tracey insists that she is an "everyday person," she strives to do her part to recycle, weatherize her home, explore solar panel options for her house and more.

"That's where my passion comes from, recognizing that even though I'm just one, there are things that I can do that are making a positive impact," she says.

"I think the things I'm most passionate about are making sure that we have clean water, clean air, beautiful places for our future generations to enjoy, as well as our current generations," she says.

Tracey continues to garden, particularly flowers, including black-eyed susans, tulips, daisies, irises and lilies.

"My belief system is that we're all connected and we all have an obligation to work together to make things better for one another," she says. "So, what can I do to aid that situation to make it better?"

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.

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“Nest, found near Boone, NC, with plastic netting” by James M. Davidson
 Winner, Our Ecological Footprint
 13th annual Appalachian Mtn Photo Competition

Jimmy Davidson found this nest on the ground where it had fallen from a tree, well-constructed but with conspicuous plastic netting which poses an entanglement hazard to young birds as well as other wildlife. The image won the Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition Our Ecological Footprint category sponsored by Appalachian Voices and Mast General Store. An exhibit of the finalists is on display at the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts in Boone, N.C. now through June 4.



Renew your commitment to protecting Appalachia for future generations

As spring returns to the Appalachian mountains, consider how you can help protect the land, air, water and communities of this unique and beautiful region of the world.

Appalachian Voices is a nonprofit, grassroots organization working to save the central and southern Appalachian mountains from serious environmental threats and to advance a vision for a cleaner energy future. Join us today.

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