

FREE

# The Appalachian VOICE

August/September 2018

## Stewarding Our National Forests

America's public lands are a place of refuge and recreation, but how we manage them is a topic of intense debate

### ALSO INSIDE



#### PIPELINE UPDATE

Legal challenges, protests continue against MVP and ACP



#### REMAKING DOWNTOWNS

Communities strive to bring back main street



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## A note from our executive director

My three young kids have been belting out all six verses to Woody Guthrie's 1940s patriotic classic "This Land is Your Land" this summer. The rousing anthem to the American landscape seems especially poignant now, as thousands of citizens rise up to confront goliath pipeline companies manipulating the system to wrest long stretches of land from ordinary citizens.

This nearly 80-year-old song resonates in our children's young ears, I believe, because of its insistence on a truth much, much older. At a deep level, the land — like our air and water — is something we all share. This truth about our relationship to the land, and the call to action it entails, seems more relevant now than ever.

And so we — like families all across our region — celebrated in late July when a federal appeals court rescinded the government permits allowing the Mountain Valley Pipeline to cut through the rugged Appalachian landscape of the Jefferson National Forest. In this

major victory for pipeline opponents, the three-judge panel unanimously ruled in favor of the Sierra Club, Appalachian Voices and Wild Virginia, sending the hastily issued federal permits back to the drawing board and leading FERC to issue a stop-work order for the Mountain Valley Pipeline the next week.

Not mincing words, the court made clear that the Trump administration failed in its duty to Americans to protect this priceless land:

"[Mountain Valley Pipeline's] proposed project would be the largest pipeline of its kind to cross the Jefferson National Forest," the opinion states. "American citizens understandably place their trust in the Forest Service to protect and preserve this country's forests, and they deserve more than silent acquiescence to a pipeline company's justification for upending large swaths of national forestlands."



Tom Cormons enjoying a swim at Harper Creek Falls in Pisgah National Forest this summer.

Unfortunately, such "silent acquiescence" to the will of powerful interests is too often the habitual response of those entrusted to safeguard our shared natural wealth. But we are seeing how our system of checks and balances, in concert with a robust citizen response, can compel our decision makers to think again. The late Woody Guthrie's wisdom, channeled through the next generation, won't let us forget the rights and responsibilities we have to the land we share.

For a just future,

Tom Cormons, Executive Director

## GET INVOLVED environmental & cultural events

### Geology and Natural Communities Talk & Walk

Aug. 18, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.: Learn about the geology of Brasstown Bald and how it affects living things. \$5, children under 16 free. Hiawassee, Ga. Call (706) 896-2556 or Visit: tinyurl.com/Geology-NaturalCommunities

**22nd Annual Appalachian Festival**  
Aug. 24-26: Enjoy three days of music, arts and crafts, food and more. Free admission. Beckley, W.Va. Visit: appalachianfestival.net or call (877) 987-3847

**Virginia Environmental Assembly**  
Sept. 7-8: Join the Virginia Conservation Network as conservation leaders host a forum about key environmental issues in Virginia. \$40. Free for College of William and Mary students, \$20 for other students. Williamsburg, Va. Call (804) 644-0283 or Visit: tinyurl.com/VirginiaEnvironmentalAssembly.

**WV Black Heritage Festival**  
Sept. 7-9: The 28th annual festival will include vendors, live music, a youth block party and a church service Sunday morning. Free. Clarksburg, W.Va. Visit: wvbhf.com or call (304) 641-9963.

**27th Annual Cherokee Fall Festival**  
Sept. 8-9, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.: Enjoy Cherokee food, arts and crafts, music and reenactments at the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum. The theme this year is "From the Ashes." No pets. Adults \$10, children ages 13-18 \$5, under 12 free. Vonore, Tenn. Visit: tinyurl.com/CherokeeFallFestival or call (423) 884-6246.

### ACP Compressor Public Hearing

Sept. 11, 5-9:30 p.m.: Speak at a public hearing for an Atlantic Coast Pipeline compressor station, or submit a public comment by Sept. 11. Buckingham County, Va. Visit: tinyurl.com/BuckinghamHearing or call (804) 698-4000

### ASAP's Local Food Experience

Sept. 13, 6-8:30 p.m.: Enjoy delicious food and socialize with regional farmers and chefs to connect your food with where it comes from. \$30. Asheville, N.C. Call (828) 236-1282 or visit: asapconnections.org

### OVEC Annual Meeting and Treehuggers' Ball

Sept. 15, 3-10 p.m.: Join the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition for their annual meeting and food, music and fun. Cost TBA. Huntington, W.Va. Call (304) 522-0246 or visit: ohvec.org/ovecs-annual-meeting.

### Brushy Fork Annual Institute

Sept. 18-20: Network and train on leadership and economic development to provide skills needed to combat pressing issues in our region. \$475, \$400 for AmeriCorps and students. Berea, Ky. Call (859) 985-3858 or visit: berea.edu/brushy-fork-annual-institute.

### Fields Edge Farm Fall Festival

Sept. 29, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.: Enjoy agricultural history tours, local food and farm tours. Free admission. Floyd, Va. Visit: fieldsedgefarms.com or call (540) 789-2347.

### West Virginia Herb Association Fall Conference

Sept. 29, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.: Network with fellow herbalists and learn about herb cultivation

See more at [appvoices.org/calendar](http://appvoices.org/calendar)

through workshops and lectures. \$50, lunch included. Hurricane, W.Va. Call (304) 542-1635 or visit: wwherbassociation.org/events.

### Cranberry Shindig

Sept. 30, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.: Local artisans will demonstrate and sell their goods, including blacksmithing, soap making and dulcimer making at the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center. Free. Hillsboro, W.Va. Visit: tinyurl.com/CranberryShindig or call (304) 653-4826.

### Shakori Hills Grassroots Festival

Oct. 4-7: Enjoy three days of music, art and education. Swing by the Appalachian Voices table! Early Bird tickets: \$90 adult, \$45 ages 13-15. No pets. Pittsboro, N.C. Call (919) 542-8142 or visit: shakorihillsgrassroots.org.

### National Storytelling Festival

Oct. 5-7: Enjoy live storytelling and workshops at the 46th annual festival. Ticket prices vary. Jonesborough, Tenn. Visit: storytellingcenter.net/festival or call (800) 952-8392.

### Homestead Dreams Workshop

Oct. 6, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.: An entry-level workshop for those wanting to work towards self-reliance through living off the land. \$65. Buncombe County, N.C. Call (828) 214-7833 or visit: tinyurl.com/HomesteadDreams.

### Save Our Streambanks

Oct. 9, 6-7:30 p.m.: Join Bluegrass Greensource for a workshop on local watersheds, grant opportunities, the benefits of streamside buffers and how to spot and remove invasive species. Free. Carlisle, Ky. Visit: bggreensource.org or call (859) 266-1572.

## Across Appalachia

### Giant Hogweed Sprouting up in Appalachia

New patches of giant hogweed, a toxic species indigenous to the Caucasus Mountains in Eastern Europe, have been discovered growing in western North Carolina's Watauga County. According to Dr. Jim Hamilton, director of the North Carolina Cooperative Watauga County Extension, officials have been dealing with the noxious weed in the county for the past 10 to 15 years. It was originally planted by some homeowners as a decorative yard plant.

Giant hogweed can grow to 15 feet tall and excretes sap that can badly blister skin and cause blindness if it comes in contact with eyes. According to Hamil-

ton, the sap is photo sensitive, meaning it reacts when exposed to sunlight, but not every individual experiences an extreme reaction. Individuals who encounter the sap should immediately wash the area with soap and cold water and avoid the sun. If sap gets in your eyes, rinse them with water and put on sunglasses. If you experience any reaction, call a doctor.

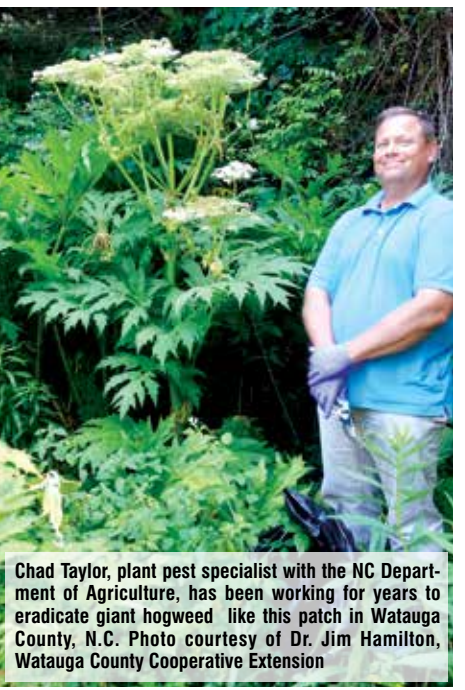
Watauga is the only county in North Carolina so far where giant hogweed has been identified. The weed is also found in Clarke, Fauquier and Rockingham counties in Virginia, and CBS News reported patches in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Oregon,

Washington, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

The tall plant contains flowers that resemble those on the much smaller Queen Anne's lace, and is often confused with cow parsnip, a plant loosely related to giant hogweed but native to North America. According to Hamilton, hogweed seeds can live dormant in soil for up to 15 years before germinating, making it especially challenging to eradicate.

If you identify giant hogweed, do not try to cut it down; instead call your state invasive species division or contact your local agricultural extension agent.

— By Locke Curtis & staff



Chad Taylor, plant pest specialist with the NC Department of Agriculture, has been working for years to eradicate giant hogweed like this patch in Watauga County, N.C. Photo courtesy of Dr. Jim Hamilton, Watauga County Cooperative Extension

## BY THE NUMBERS

**4** River boat access points currently under construction by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. 12 are in the design phase and 10 are in the concept stage.

**300** Species in Kentucky that are considered vulnerable or endangered. A new membership-based state program called Kentucky Wild aims to raise funds to protect at-risk species and offers opportunities for members to join biologists in hands-on conservation projects.

**6** Tennessee counties that will no longer require vehicle emissions testing under a new state law. The law will not go into effect until approved by the EPA, which could take three years.

**9** Days of racing involved in the long-distance American Solar Challenge, a biannual, international solar vehicle race. Appalachian State University and the University of Minnesota tied for second place behind Italy's University of Bologna.

**59.5** Percentage of honeybee hives lost in Virginia during the winter of 2017-2018, the highest percentage lost since 2000. — By Molly Moore

### Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative Extended

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy are extending a 2008 Memorandum of Understanding to protect and restore the Clinch and Powell rivers in Tennessee and Virginia.

With this extension, the agencies responsible for administering the Clean Water Act and Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, as well as corresponding state laws in Tennessee and

Virginia, will continue working together to restore the watershed over the next 10 years through the Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative.

The Clinch-Powell watershed is an important area for biodiversity in North America and is home to 20 endangered freshwater mussel species. In an EPA news release, Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative Science Team Chair Braven Beaty said that the team's research has shown "that habitat conditions in the rivers are fairly good, but that rare freshwater mussels are under chronic

stress from relatively low-concentrations of metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons."

The agencies included in the initiative aim to reduce the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment and toxic pollution going to the rivers by working with local farmers to implement best management practices. They also plan to reduce stormwater runoff, improve local wastewater management and restore land and water that has been impacted by coal mining with the Abandoned Mine Land Fund. — By Sara Crouch

payments ceased until 2017 despite efforts by county officials and the district's current and former congressional representatives.

According to Smoky Mountain News, Swain County Commission Chairman Phil Carson said, "hopefully [the principle on this sum] will help future generations not have to pay higher tax rates to be able to live here." — By Locke Curtis

### Swain County to Receive \$35.2 Million for "Road to Nowhere"

After eight years of waiting, Swain County, N.C., received a \$35.2 million settlement from the federal government over the incomplete "Road to Nowhere" located in Bryson City. Construction on the road began after World War II under a 1943 federal agreement to give access to the North Shore ancestral lands and cemeteries made inaccessible by the creation of Fontana Lake.

Construction stopped in 1970 for financial and environmental reasons after conservationists garnered national support to oppose the project because of the damage it would cause to local ecosystems. In 2010, Swain County made an agreement with the U.S. Department of the Interior that allocated \$52 million to the county by 2020. After a \$12.8 million payout in 2010, these

These discoveries help fill in the historical gaps of the lives of the 94 slaves owned by Jefferson, as well as scores of others who were enslaved by the Cobbs and Hutter families later on. The students have found plates, bottles and smoking pipes at two of the slave quarter sites.

"These sites will reveal new data about the daily lives of both enslaved and free people who labored on this plantation



**About the Cover**  
Photographer Bob Stough took his photo "Clearing Storm on North Fork Mountain" looking down on the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. Stough is a nature photographer from the Laurel Highlands of Pennsylvania who uses his images to celebrate the wilds of Appalachia and inspire others to cherish and preserve them. See more of his work at [bobstoughphotography.com](http://bobstoughphotography.com)

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## The STAY Project Celebrates 10 Years

By Sara Crouch

The Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) Project celebrated 10 years in July. The STAY Project is a youth-led organization of people ages 14 to 30 that aims to “make Appalachia a place young people can and want to stay,” according to Lou Murrey, current STAY project coordinator.

STAY was formed as a result of a conversation at the 2008 Appalachian Studies Association Conference about “pathways to meaningful participation of young people in the social justice work that was taking place in our region,” says Joe Tolbert, one of STAY’s founding members.

According to Tolbert, STAY also works to counter “brain drain” — the “notion that in order to go to good schools and to be successful, you have to leave the region.” To Tolbert, “it was clear that if we wanted people to stay home and in the region, we had to make sure that our home and region were able to support our staying and thriving.”

Murrey says, “It’s really hard to access our full potential when [we] don’t

have access to clean water, or high paying jobs, or healthcare, or education, or if you are LGBTQ or a person of color and don’t feel safe in your community.”

The STAY Project works to help Appalachian youth reach their full potential through asking regional young people what they need to stay and work in their communities, connecting them with resources and recognizing young leaders who are already creating change.

The organization’s focus shifts as members age out and new members come in. “STAY ... is the people who are there,” Murrey says.

To Murrey, STAY is home. “I finally felt like there were people who understood me, who were from Appalachia and recognize that importance and what it means,” Murrey shared. They found people like them who are “radical and queer, and allowed me to mess up and do better, to hold me accountable, but to be gentle as I learned.”



Olivia Lowery D’Amato, a STAY steering committee member from Big Stone Gap, Va., says that “I found STAY at a really great time because I was feeling loneliness, and STAY gave me a space where I could be exactly who I am.”

The 10-year anniversary was celebrated at their annual STAY Summer Institute, which allows members to come together, learn from one another, voice their goals for the coming year and decide which issues the group will address. This year, members who have aged out of STAY were invited.

To Lowery D’Amato, this milestone is a “beautiful time of reflection and celebration of where we come from ... It’s this moment of reinvigoration, especially in this political climate.”

Tolbert says he is grateful for this anniversary. “At 10 years, my belief in people working to change their realities is definitely strengthened because of the legacy of us coming together to try.”

## 90 Percent Reduction Proposed for Red Wolf Protected Habitat

On June 21, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a plan to decrease the protected habitat of the endangered red wolf in Eastern North Carolina by nearly 90 percent, even though the species has only 35 remaining members in the wild. According to the agency, this proposal intends to refocus conservation efforts on a smaller area since the program has been largely unsuccessful.

Creation of the original protected area was met with some public opposition from concerned livestock owners and coyote hunters. However, Perrin de Jong, a staff attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity — a nonprofit endangered species protection organization — says red wolves have only been responsible for five livestock deaths since 1997 and healthy wolf populations

tend to push out coyotes.

“The Trump administration’s Fish and Wildlife Service is declaring open season to kill the last of America’s red wolves, which are on the verge of extinction,” de Jong said in a press release. If the new plan is adopted this November, hunters will no longer have to consult the Fish and Wildlife Service before killing wolves spotted outside of the 200,000-acre protected area in North Carolina’s Hyde and Dare counties.

According to conservationists, the

## Asian Carp Spreading Near East Tennessee

Asian carp, an invasive species originally brought to the United States in the 1970s for aquaculture purposes, could be spreading to East Tennessee’s part of the Tennessee River. Evidence of Asian carp was found in Chickamauga Lake northeast of Chattanooga, according to Chattanooga News Channel 9.

There are four types of Asian carp

## SolSmart Designation in Works for Southwest Virginia

In June, several counties and towns in Southwest Virginia received a technical assistance grant from the Department of Energy to help develop solar energy in the area. A technical advisor will work with local officials in these communities for six months to ensure the community can receive SolSmart designation, which signifies that the area has worked to make solar energy more accessible.

Lou Ann Wallace, SolSmart Project Sponsor, says, “We consider the SolSmart program an economic development initiative. By attaining SolSmart Designation we can show that Southwest Virginia is open for solar business.”

SolSmart supporters argue that the designation could encourage economic diversity by bringing in new industries that are interested in renewable energy.

A press release from Appalachian Voices, one of the members of the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia and the publisher of this newspaper, explains that the program is also designed to make solar energy more affordable and accessible “by engaging with utilities and installers to provide clear information for homeowners, as well as working with local government to establish financing mechanisms for low-income communities.” — *By Sara Crouch*

key flaw of the reintroduction effort was the lack of community outreach and education about the benefits of protecting the species. A public comment period on the new proposal took place in July. — *By Locke Curtis*

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# Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipeline Challenges Continue

By Kevin Ridder

On Aug. 3, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a stop-work order for the entire Mountain Valley Pipeline, effective immediately. The order cited a July 27 decision by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that stripped Mountain Valley of permits from the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management needed for the pipeline to cut through 3.5 miles of the Jefferson National Forest. The July decision came as a result of a challenge from the Sierra Club, Wild Virginia and Appalachian Voices, the publisher of this newspaper.

The federal judges wrote, "American citizens understandably place their trust in the Forest Service to protect and preserve this country's forests, and they deserve more than silent acquiescence to a pipeline company's justification for upending large swaths of national forestlands. Citizens also trust in the Bureau of Land Management to prevent undue degradation to public lands."

In its August stop-work order, FERC stated that "should the agencies authorize alternative routes, [Mountain Valley Pipeline] may need to revise substantial portions of the project route across non-federal lands, possibly requiring further authorizations and environmental review. Accordingly, allowing continued construction poses the risk of expending substantial resources and substantially disturbing the environment by constructing facilities that ultimately

might have to be relocated or abandoned."

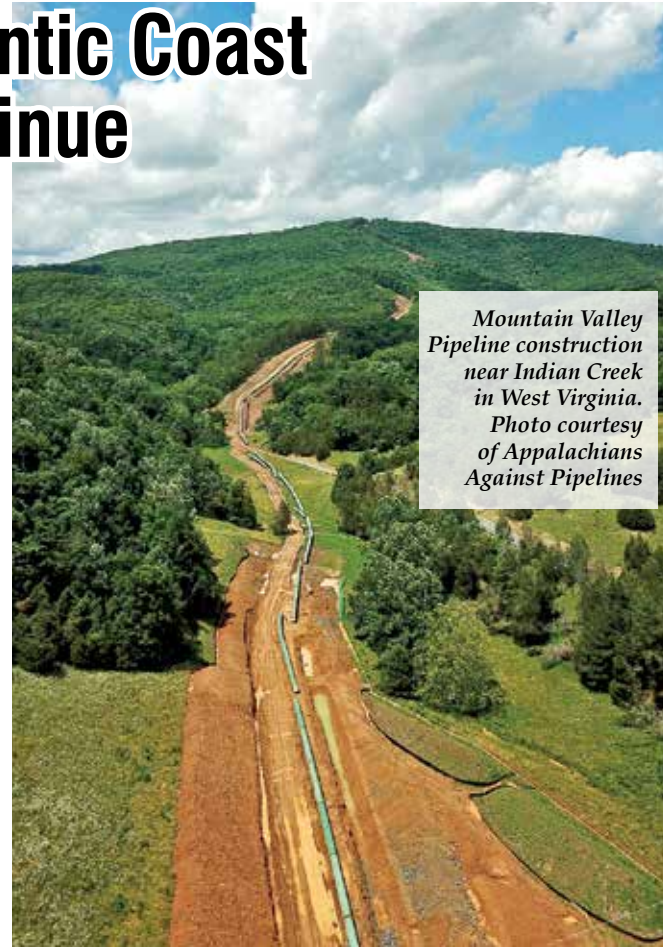
FERC's order notes that pipeline developers are permitted to do work that FERC or other land management agencies deem necessary "to ensure the stabilization of the right of way and work areas."

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline's permit to cross the George Washington and Monongahela national forests is facing a similar challenge brought by Sierra Club, Wild Virginia and other organizations. It is scheduled for a hearing on Sept. 28.

The slew of legal battles against Mountain Valley has caused developers to push back the expected completion date from late 2018 to early 2019. In June, the 4th Circuit suspended the pipeline's construction across waters in West Virginia when the judges granted a stay of a crucial permit under section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

The permit, issued by the Army Corps of Engineers, is needed for the Mountain Valley Pipeline to cross nearly 600 water bodies in West Virginia, including the Greenbrier, Elk and Gauley rivers.

On Aug. 1, the same court ruled in favor of Mountain Valley, upholding the Virginia State Water Control Board's decision under Clean Water Act section



Mountain Valley Pipeline construction near Indian Creek in West Virginia. Photo courtesy of Appalachians Against Pipelines

401 to allow the pipeline to cross streams and wetlands in the commonwealth. The 4th Circuit also ruled in favor of pipeline developers on July 25 by upholding Mountain Valley's usage of eminent domain to take private land against landowners' wishes.

Ben Luckett with Appalachian Mountain Advocates, a nonprofit law firm involved in the Clean Water Act case, told The Roanoke Times that the groups will "continue to pursue all other available legal avenues to oppose this harmful and unnecessary project."

As of Aug. 2, Virginia and West Virginia environmental regulators have issued six notices of violation to the

Mountain Valley Pipeline for failure to control erosion and stormwater runoff, which could lead to the state agencies issuing fines or stop-work orders.

## Steep Slopes

In the predawn hours of June 7, TransCanada Corporation's Leach XPress Pipeline exploded in Marshall County, W.Va., and burned for several hours. No injuries or property damage were reported, although the blast left a crater and scorched an estimated 10 acres, according to WTRF News. The pipeline began service in January, at which time TransCanada President and CEO Russ Girling said, "this is truly a best-in-class pipeline and we look forward to many years of safe, reliable and efficient operation."

The U.S. Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration estimates the explosion resulted from a landslide that put stress on a weld, and stated in July that "it appears conditions

exist on [TransCanada's] pipeline system that pose an integrity risk to public safety, property or the environment." Although TransCanada identified six other "areas of concern" along the 160-mile pipeline's path, the pipeline resumed service in mid-July.

The Leach XPress explosion has intensified calls from environmental groups to stop construction on fracked gas infrastructure snaking across Appalachia. TransCanada is also building the 165-mile Mountaineer XPress Pipeline through 14 West Virginia counties.

*Continued on next page*

## Mariner East 2

Sunoco's 350-mile Mariner East 2 Pipeline is slated to stretch across Pennsylvania. In July, three environmental groups — the Mountain Watershed Association, the Clean Air Council and the Delaware Riverkeeper Network — dropped their appeals over permits the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection issued to Sunoco, according to the Tribune-Review. In return, the DEP agreed to increase transparency with pipeline project documents and will create a stakeholder group within 90 days composed of representatives from the DEP, the three environmental groups and pipeline proponents.

On July 27, Huntingdon, Pa., retired special ed teacher and pipeline protester Ellen Gerhart was jailed and placed on a \$25,000 cash bail for allegedly violating a court order to not interfere with pipeline construction workers, according to StateImpact Pennsylvania. Her daughter Elise told StateImpact that Ellen is unable to meet bail and will remain in jail until her next court appearance on Aug. 3.

As of Aug. 2, the DEP has issued 70 notices of violation to Mariner East 2 developer Sunoco. Construction on parts of the pipeline in West Whiteland Township, Pa., remain halted as of press time after a judge ordered a safety review in May. The adjacent Mariner East 1 Pipeline, however, was allowed to restart in June.

## Pipeline Challenges

*Continued from previous page*

Scheduled to enter service in late 2018, Mountaineer XPress had received six notices of violation from West Virginia regulators as of Aug. 2.

The Indian Creek Watershed Association, a community group in Monroe County, W.Va., expressed their concerns about the similar landscape the Leach XPress and the Mountain Valley Pipeline slash through in a July 17 letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

"The similarities of terrain — particularly the prevalence of steep slopes and landslide-prone areas along [Mountain Valley Pipeline's] 300-mile route through West Virginia and Virginia — make the Leach Xpress explosion yet another wake-up call about the dangers of MVP's selected route," the letter reads. The organization also pointed out that the 42-inch diameter Mountain Valley Pipeline is wider and would carry more gas than the 36-inch Leach XPress Pipeline.

On June 29, Mountain Valley voluntarily suspended construction in parts of Southwest Virginia after heavy rains overwhelmed sediment and erosion control measures. Virginia regulators issued a formal notice of violation on July 9, outlining eight likely violations of the law. Work had resumed at 33 of the 35 locations by July 23 after Virginia regulators approved the new measures, Kallanish Energy reports.

## Atlantic Coast Pipeline

On July 27, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers suspended construction of the 600-mile Atlantic Coast Pipeline at all West Virginia river crossings at the request of Dominion Energy and other developers, following the court-ordered stay on the Mountain Valley Pipeline's water crossings, according to the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

"Allowing this additional time for review is in the best interest of the environment and West Virginia's natural resources," Dominion spokesman Aaron Ruby told the Richmond newspaper.

On July 23, FERC approved full construction of a 115-mile North Carolina section of the 600-mile Atlantic Coast Pipeline, according to the Charlotte Business Journal. Construction has been halted along 100 miles of the pipeline in Virginia and West Virginia since mid-May, when a federal court determined that a review of impacts to endangered

species conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was insufficient.

FERC did not require Atlantic Coast developers to take any further steps to protect endangered species in North Carolina, even though the approved section intersects rivers designated as critical habitat for the endangered Atlantic sturgeon. The Neuse River waterdog — a type of salamander under review for federal protection and listed by the state as "special concern" — also lives in the pipeline's approved path.

Dominion has continued construction in West Virginia areas not affected by pending litigation and intends to begin construction in Virginia later this year, according to the Charlotte Business Journal.

On July 31, four Republican senators introduced a bill to make it more difficult for states to use the federal Clean Water Act to slow or prevent construction of fossil fuel infrastructure. The bill would limit the scope of what states can consider when conducting a section 401 review, further streamlining the permit process and removing states' authority to protect their waters.

## Protests Block Construction

Protests against the Mountain Valley Pipeline have continued throughout the summer. On July 31, retired Monroe County, W.Va., teacher Becky Crabtree blocked construction for several hours by barricading herself in a 1971 Ford Pinto on top of wooden blocks. The Pinto was on a section of her land that Mountain Valley obtained through eminent domain. After police safely extracted Crabtree, she was arrested and charged with a misdemeanor, according to the Bluefield Daily Telegraph. Crabtree was released from jail the same day.

"Today's effort was a bit extraordinary but these are extraordinary times," she told the Telegraph. "Pintos are obsolete and so are fossil fuels!"

On June 28, Emily Satterwhite, a Virginia Tech associate professor of Appalachian studies, locked herself to pipeline construction equipment in Jefferson National Forest. Police removed her after 12 hours, after which she was



Protesters confront EQT Midstream Partners, developers of the MVP, at the company's June shareholders' meeting in Pittsburgh. Photo by Steve Dietz/Appalachians Against Pipelines

checked by a doctor and arrested. She has since been released from jail on bond.

In Monroe County, W.Va., a protestor named Max was sentenced to two days in jail after locking himself to pipeline construction equipment in early June, according to Appalachians Against Pipelines. Fern MacDougal, who obstructed pipeline construction for 12 days on an aerial platform in the Jefferson National Forest in May and June, also spent two days in jail, according to the group.

The pipeline opponent known as "Nutty," who blocked pipeline construction in a monopod for 57 days on Peters Mountain in Virginia, is scheduled to appear in court in August, The Roanoke Times reported. Three men — Doug Chancey, John Nicholson and Galen Shireman-Grabowski — who attempted to resupply Nutty with food and water during the protest were each fined \$100.

"I am not a criminal, although I have been treated as one, having been placed in leg shackles for over five hours during my arrest," Chancey told The Roanoke Times.

## FERC Changes

On June 28, FERC Commissioner Robert Powelson announced he would

step down from the federal agency in August. He was nominated by President Trump in May 2017. FERC will be split 2 to 2 between Democrats and Republicans when Powelson leaves, which could put pipeline approvals on hold. A coalition of 25 unions and energy and business trade groups wrote to Senate leadership and implored them "to vote as early as possible on FERC confirmations."

In a statement, Mary Anne Hitt, senior director of Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign, said, "The next commissioner must be a strong advocate for considering climate change in FERC's decision making process, curtailing the dangerous overbuilding of fracked gas pipelines, and stand firmly against reckless coal and nuclear plant bailouts the Trump Administration and grid operators are proposing."

Since 1999, FERC has only rejected two out of approximately 400 pipeline projects. An official comment period regarding FERC's pipeline approval process ended on July 25. The agency sought feedback on how it evaluates pipeline need, use of eminent domain for pipelines, regulatory efficiency and how it assesses environmental impacts.

Environmental groups, including Appalachian Voices, submitted comments asking FERC to conduct a deeper analysis of both the market demand for fracked gas and the environmental impacts of existing and proposed pipelines. Additionally, the groups want FERC to give more weight to the voices of those directly impacted by the projects. ♦

## Mountain Valley Southgate Extension

In June, Mountain Valley Pipeline developers held open houses in three counties to address questions and concerns regarding MVP Southgate, the pipeline's proposed 70-mile expansion into North Carolina. Announced in May, the 24-inch fracked-gas pipeline would run from Virginia's Pittsylvania County through North Carolina's Rockingham and Alamance counties. Industrial compressor stations to pressurize the gas would be built in Pittsylvania County and Rockingham County.

The private companies behind MVP Southgate expect the \$350 million project to be operational by late 2020, contingent on approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the

states of North Carolina and Virginia. So far, residential heating provider PSNC Energy is the only purchaser of the gas.

Opponents of the pipeline like Ridge Graham, North Carolina field coordinator with Appalachian Voices, are skeptical of the pipeline developers' claims that it is needed to bring affordable natural gas to the region.

"The fact is that this extension is ultimately unnecessary," said Graham. "PSNC Energy, the only announced purchaser of gas for the extension, is served by eight other pipelines, including the massive Williams Transco Pipeline that runs through the very same county."

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The National Forest Foundation, a non-profit that supports these public lands, estimates that visitor spending contributes \$13.5 billion to the economy annually. These forests are also the site of scientific research on subjects such as climate change and invasive species. Yet they are simultaneously home to significant logging projects and often mineral extraction, which can include mining,



stone removal or drilling for oil and gas. Some forests are also scarred by long-abandoned mines or oil wells.

While national parks are focused on conservation, recreation and education, national forests have a much broader charter. The U.S. Forest Service's mission is to "sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." Determining the needs of recreational visitors, hunters, anglers, various industries and at-risk species and ecosystems is a challenging task. Impassioned forest-lovers may disagree about how well the agency is doing, especially given its complex charter and budget constraints. But because national forests belong to all of us, we all have an opportunity to shape their direction — both through the national forest planning process (see p. 11) and through the ballot box.

## Healthy or Harmful? THE HOTLY DEBATED TOPICS OF TIMBER HARVESTS AND PRESCRIBED BURNS

By Kevin Ridder

Before much of what are now Central and Southern Appalachia's public lands gained federal protection in the late 19th and early 20th century, they were the lands that nobody wanted.

"Almost all of our eastern national forests are these lands that were essentially cut over," says Jim Sitts, Appalachian timber manager with Columbia Forest Products, a hardwood product manufacturer. "They weren't managed, they were just used," he adds.

Sitts is thankful that the government had the foresight to buy these lands after the mass clearcuts.

"[Most people] don't realize when they take a Sunday drive through the national forest and think, 'wow, what a beautiful forest this is,' that it's an 80- to 100-year-old stand of timber that came up from a clearcut at the turn of the last century," he says.

Today, the U.S. Forest Service is responsible for the management of national forest lands and conducts timber harvests and prescribed burns — fires that are intentionally set in a designated area. The agency typically cites a need to improve forest health and biodiversity, as well as economic benefits through timber sales. In Central and Southern Appalachian forests, two issues the agency often focuses on are creating more young forest lands for certain spe-

cies and mitigating the decline of fire-resistant species like oak and pine over the last century.

According to a 2017 Forest Service report, fire has played an important ecological role in Appalachian forests for millennia. The report states that fire "essentially operated as a filter on tree establishment within fire-prone sites by destroying the seedlings of fire-sensitive species." However, due to human efforts to suppress wildfires, these and other fire-dependent ecosystems are being replaced by more fire-sensitive species like mountain laurel that crowd out mature trees and block light from reaching seedlings. Targeting these species for harvest can allow for oak and pine to regenerate more successfully — but many environmental groups believe the Forest Service overuses these methods.

In June, the Forest Service cancelled the proposed 534-acre "Dinkey Project" timber sale in Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest after the nonprofit law firm Southern Environmental Law Center and Knoxville attorney Shelby Ward filed a lawsuit on behalf of several environmental organizations including Heartwood and the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club.



By selectively removing undesirable trees while leaving preferred trees standing, forest managers hope to guide the next generation of forest. But opinions vary on how often — or if — this practice is helpful. Photo by Neil P. Thompson

The plaintiffs asserted that the project put a popular trout stream alongside the timber sale site at risk of sediment pollution and that the Forest Service hid risks from the public and ignored citizen concerns over several years. The conservation groups warned that the project would repeat problems associated with the nearby 2015 Hogback timber sale,

where the groups allege soil loss caused by logging has prevented trees from growing back.

"There was no indication that the Forest Service learned anything from Hogback, and the Tumbling Creek project was even riskier, with more ground disturbances, larger harvests and steeper slopes, all concentrated on the banks of Tumbling Creek," Axel Ringe, conservation chair for the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club, said in a statement.

The Clinch Coalition, a Virginia grassroots environmental organization, has been critical of timber harvests in Jefferson National Forest since the group was founded in 1998. In a 1999 statement still endorsed by the group, the coalition claims that the "overwhelming majority of timber harvest sites have been managed in a manner that degrades the forest ecosystem leading to declines in forest health, water quality, and ecological diversity."

According to the organization's president, Diana Withen, "Ideally, The Clinch Coalition would like to see an end of commercial logging on national forest and other public lands but until such a time that this happens, we are committed to working with the Forest Service on sustainable forest manage-

Continued on page 10



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## Healthy or Harmful

Continued from page 8

ment planning in the hope that it will pursue sustainable logging practices.”

### Competing Needs

According to the Forest Service’s Southern Regional Planning Director Peter Gaulke, timber harvest is important in order to maintain a variety of forest succession stages, or periods in a forest growth cycle. For example, wildflowers and shrubs that grow first in a forest after clear-cutting are considered early succession.

In an email, Gaulke commented on the composition of forest types in the general landscape, both within and beyond national forest boundaries. “Our landscapes are generally lacking early [successional] stages as called for in our forest plans,” Gaulke wrote. “Timber harvest allows for us to have the range of [successional] stages to meet the habitat needs of a variety of wildlife species.”

The golden-winged warbler lives in the early successional stages of forest. Since the songbird’s population is declining, timber harvest in more mature forest areas can help create more habitat.

According to a 2005 Forest Service paper, “The high reproductive success of the [golden-winged warbler] in clearcuts in the Southern Appalachians, while the species is disappearing from areas without management intervention, argues strongly for repeated disturbances in these landscapes.”

Yet these practices might take away habitat from vulnerable species like the cerulean warbler that prefer later successional stages of forest. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states that “some forest management practices remove the largest trees, eliminating the structurally diverse canopy that ceruleans need.”

Jim Sitts with Columbia Forest Products thinks the public lands in Western North Carolina play an important role in the landscape. He says that national forests add “a lot of value because you have these core forests, an intact forest landscape, whereas all the private land is very fragmented and becoming more and more fragmented ... It’s a place where all your different species can seek refuge.”

According to Curtis Smalling, director of bird conservation for the nonprofit environmental organization Audubon North Carolina, the state is lucky because

a lot of the closed-canopy bird populations are fairly stable, including the cerulean warbler population.

He states that it’s important to think about how public and private lands support each other.

When people look at the Southern Appalachian forests, Smalling says, they typically point out that forest interior species are doing fine, which he attributes to the region’s expansive closed canopy system. Smalling explains that increasing early successional habitat for birds like the golden-winged warbler “may help those species but then reverse the stability of the others, which we don’t want to happen.”

“We want to help early successional birds like the golden-winged warbler, but we don’t want to do that at the expense of other closed-canopy system birds,” he adds.

Forest Service Planning Officer Michelle Aldridge in North Carolina says, “I think there is a role to look beyond the Forest Service line and think about how the forest is affecting and is affected by the things that are standing next to it.”

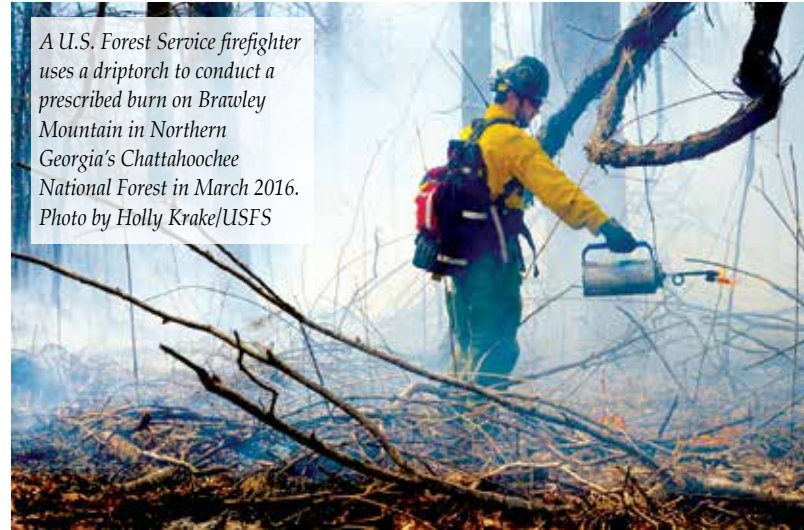
“When we put Forest Service lands in the context of a broader landscape, it helps the landscape goals become more clear,” she adds.

### Burning Questions

Native Americans are widely thought to have used fire as a tool to clear underbrush and improve wildlife habitat for thousands of years. Fire-resistant trees like oak and pine depend on regular fires to weed out competitors, and small-scale fires can reduce dry fuel to prevent catastrophic wildfires and create a more diverse habitat.

In the last century, however, fires have been largely suppressed to protect human interests. This has led to oak and pine forests being replaced by more fire-sensitive species like red maple, according to a 2017 Forest Service paper. Due to this, the Forest Service often makes use of prescribed burns, timber harvests and other methods to mimic the forests’ fire-adapted ecosystem.

“Contrary to popular belief, all clearcuts do not remove every tree from a stand; instead, ‘leave trees’ are left behind



A U.S. Forest Service firefighter uses a driptorch to conduct a prescribed burn on Brawley Mountain in Northern Georgia's Chattahoochee National Forest in March 2016. Photo by Holly Krake/USFS

to promote biological and structural diversity. This process mimics how wildfires may leave certain trees unscathed in their path, while burning others,” wrote the Forest Service’s Peter Gaulke in an email.

But Josh Kelly, public lands field biologist with MountainTrue, a Western North Carolina grassroots environmental nonprofit organization, states that there are some key differences between fires and clearcuts.

“I think that logging projects can mimic the light environment that you get after a very severe fire, but there are a lot of ways that they are not similar — in fact, they’re kind of the opposite,” Kelly says. “Fire, in general, kills the smaller trees in the forest, and logging tends to take the largest ones, so you have big differences in the resulting forest structure. You also have big differences in the species composition that occurs because fire actually gives a competitive edge to some species that don’t do as well in the absence of fire.”

“There’s a lot of benefit that the fire provides that mechanical management just can’t provide,” he adds.

According to Gaulke, “prescribed fire is critically important in our fire adaptive ecosystems,” and is the Forest Service’s “most common and most important forest management tool” in the Southeastern United States.

Forest management plans often include goals for amount of acres burned. But groups like Heartwood, a regional nonprofit forest conservation organization, have been critical of the Forest Service’s wide use of prescribed burns.

“While fire is not completely without a place in the eastern hardwood forests, having been used by Indigenous Americans as a management tool in a variety of ways, the fires would have been small

and unlikely to exceed 8 acres,” Heartwood states on their website. “A typical prescribed burn on eastern public land currently ranges from 200-500 acres, with a recent project in Kentucky planned for thousands of acres.”

According to Heartwood’s website, these large burn projects result partially from a 2001 policy change that increased the Forest Service’s budget for fire management.

The organization claims this “acts as an incentive for the Forest Service to find reasons to burn in the eastern United States, thereby increasing their revenue.”

One prescribed burn that attracted controversy was a 2014 proposal to conduct a 1,500-acre burn at Straight Fork in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. The Forest Service stated it would improve oak and pine regeneration, create early successional habitat and reduce wildfire fuel.

The Clinch Coalition formally objected to the proposal in a comment submitted to the Forest Service, claiming the agency had not provided enough information and that the topography of the area suggested it “would not likely benefit from and could be harmed by fire.”

According to The Clinch Coalition’s Associate Director Steve Brooks, a forest service representative explained to him that although there are some areas in greater need of burning, they are harder and more expensive to reach.

“It would be much better to use the limited funds to burn fewer acres where it is needed, than burn many acres where it is not needed and may potentially cause harm,” Brooks wrote in the objection. The agency later decided to indefinitely suspend the burn after the comment period ended.

According to the Forest Service’s Michelle Aldridge, the public has a critical role in providing input on forest management plans, which set goals for activities like prescribed burns and timber harvests.

“I think it’s important for people to know about and be involved in because it’s public land, it’s land that is shared by all of us,” Aldridge says. “Management of that land is something that Americans have a stake in.” ♦

# The Clinch Coalition: 20 YEARS OF PROTECTING JEFFERSON NATIONAL FOREST

By Molly Moore

The Clinch Coalition is busy preparing for its annual High Knob Naturalist Rally. The free, day-long event with activities and presentations is designed to showcase the extraordinary biodiversity and natural wonders of Southwest Virginia. And this year there’s a special happening on the agenda — The Clinch Coalition’s 20-year anniversary celebration.

The grassroots environmental group formed in 1998 when residents of Virginia’s far southwest corner joined together in opposition to a proposed 1,400-acre timber sale in the Bark Camp Area of Jefferson National Forest’s Clinch Ranger District. With the support of then-Congressman Rick Boucher, the group led an awareness campaign and participated in the public input process; ultimately, the U.S. Forest Service reduced the size of the timber sale to 620 acres.

The Clinch Ranger District is widely



At left, Clinch Coalition volunteers, including sawyer and retired District Ranger Jorge Hesel, clear fallen trees on Roaring Branch Trail. At right, hikers study a map in Nettle Patch, where the Forest Service is proposing a large timber project. Photos courtesy of The Clinch Coalition

Harry Warren and Martie Bell, both active members, embody that sense of stewardship. The couple serves as campground hosts at High Knob Recreation

Area, home of the naturalist rally. From their perch at the campground, Bell and Warren have witnessed the agency’s funding shortfalls and need for volunteers. In 2017, The Clinch Coalition helped the Forest Service conduct the inspection surveys needed to open campgrounds, picnic areas and other sites for the season, and has helped mow lawns and otherwise tend the area.

The group also aims to increase local awareness of the region’s natural riches, particularly among children. The Clinch Coalition sponsors an Earth Awareness Art and Essay Contest in local schools, with different categories for various age groups, and has hosted a free, public naturalist rally every year since 2007 (see sidebar).

And in 2014, the organization kicked off the inaugural 10-kilometer Hellbender Race — with more than 2,000 feet of elevation gain — as a fundraiser and to educate attendees about the rare, large hellbender salamanders found in the region.

“I think when you grow up in an area, you oftentimes don’t realize what

considered one of the most biodiverse zones in North America, and by some measures, the world. The area also hosts a number of popular outdoor destinations, including campgrounds and recreation areas, the High Knob and Birch Knob observation towers, a variety of trails, and lakes and rivers frequented by boaters, anglers and swimmers. Steve Brooks, the coalition’s associate director and a founding member, notes that because so much of the surrounding landscape has been mined for coal, the Clinch Ranger District is particularly valued for its recreation and ecology. This also makes the national forest valuable to the timber industry.

“This area of Virginia was considered kind of a timber basket for the Forest Service,” says Diana Withen, who became involved in the late ‘90s and is now The Clinch Coalition’s board president. “I’m a biology teacher,” she says, “so the more I learned about the biodiversity here and that we have a lot of rare and endangered species here, it made me want to protect the forest as much as a citizen can.”

The organization’s past accomplishments include blocking the development of a 30-mile ATV trail on High Knob, successfully opposing a proposal to remove surface decorative rock from High Knob’s Cliff Mountain section, and implementing a stream monitoring program.

Aware that the Forest Service is often shorthanded, The Clinch Coalition pitches in by holding events where members and other volunteers help clear, maintain and build trails. The group officially adopted the 18-mile Chief Benge Scout Trail in 2013 to ensure it stays in good condition. Brooks notes they’ve also raised money for features such as bridges and bear-resistant trash cans.



The family-friendly High Knob Naturalist Rally celebrates the natural world of Southwest Virginia. Attend programs about bats, snakes, wolves, birds of prey and wilderness survival presented by knowledgeable naturalists, or participate in guided hikes on topics such as mushrooms, salamanders, regional geology and edible and medicinal plants. Additional activities throughout the day include canoeing, fly fishing and nature arts and craft.

FREE event; entrance fee is waived and lunch is provided. Folks are encouraged to bring chairs. Campsites are available at High Knob Recreation Area for \$10/night.





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# Groups Aim to Reshape Nantahala-Pisgah Plan

By Kevin Ridder

At the moment, Deirdre Perot's favorite part of Western North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest is the 18.5-mile Buncombe Horse Range Trail. She recalls riding the trail on horseback in the summer of 2017.

"It got up to 95 degrees here in Rutherfordton, but it barely broke 70 degrees up there," Perot says. "We were riding up above the clouds, it was just absolutely gorgeous."

Perot is the national public lands representative for the Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina, part of a national nonprofit organization that works to maintain backcountry horse trails. She is also one of the founding members of the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership, a collaborative group of conservationists, an Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians representative, recreational users, timber industry representatives and more who are seeking to shape the revision of the Nantahala and Pisgah national forests' management plan.

Individual national forest management plans are usually revised by the U.S. Forest Service every 15 to 20 years. The plan for Nantahala and Pisgah was last released in 1987 and amended in 1994, and guides the management of the forests' combined 1 million-plus acres. In 2012, the Obama Administration released an updated forest planning rule allowing greater public input in the process. The Forest Service is slated to release the draft plan and draft environmental impact statement in fall 2018, after which there will be a 90-day public comment period and a series of public meetings.

In their recommendations for the new plan, the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Partnership outlines their support for a forest plan that allows the interests of their 31 members and affiliates to "co-exist and thrive." This includes better-maintained trails and campgrounds, improved protection for wilderness study areas, ecosystem restoration and more. The partnership also backs an "increase in ecologically sound timber practices that support both our local economies and healthy forest habitats."

One item Perot wants to see in the revised forest plan is greater access to equestrian trails. For instance, she says the Buncombe Horse Range Trail is not



North Carolina's Pisgah National Forest, as seen from atop Mt. Mitchell, fades into the horizon. The management plan that determines the future of both the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests is being revised for the first time since 1994. Photo by Kevin Ridder

very well known or used, partially due to its limited parking — a challenge for horse trailers.

According to Michelle Aldridge, the Forest Service's planning staff officer for the Nantahala-Pisgah forest plan revision, the 2012 rule allows the agency to more fully consider the different ways people use their public lands.

"It was pretty typical in the past that we would develop a proposal and we'd share it with the public and say, 'What do you think?'" says Aldridge. "Whereas now, we've gone to the public much earlier to say, 'Help us form this plan, help us identify what needs to change and give us your thoughts.'"

## Timber Harvest

Jim Sitts, Appalachian timber manager with Columbia Forest Products, felt it was "extremely important" to have the voice of the forest products industry at the table, especially considering what he describes as animosity over the years between the timber industry and non-governmental organizations.

Sitts expects the plan to open up more areas to timber harvest. "I know it's not going to be a huge amount, but it will certainly be more than has been available in the past," he says.

According to Josh Kelly, public

lands field biologist with MountainTrue, a Western North Carolina grassroots environmental nonprofit organization, there should be more timber harvest on national forest lands to provide habitat for some declining species (read more on page 8). Additionally, he says it can provide habitat for popular game animals.

"That being said, I still think that private lands are being harvested too much, and national forests should not be expected to produce that much timber; nowhere near as close," Kelly adds. "If you look at the past 15 years in the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest, our forests have been putting out about 800 acres of timber harvest annually, which is well within sustainable limits. In over a 100 year period, that'd be less than 10 percent of the forest being harvested; so there's definitely room to expand on the current levels of harvest."

Many wilderness advocates such as John Wilson from Avery County, N.C., only want to see logging in "appropriate areas" of the national forest.

"The new forest plan must reflect the fact that the Pisgah-Nantahala Forest is a major recreation and tourism destination, and critically important to Western North Carolina's economy. Logging in popular tourist areas like Pisgah's Globe Forest below Blowing Rock, the

Blue Ridge Parkway and Grandfather Mountain State Park damages visitor experiences and closes some areas to the public for months while trees are being cut," Wilson wrote in an email.

According to Michelle Aldridge, "previous forest plans were focused a lot more on output, like how many board-feet [of timber] are we going to produce, how many acre-feet of water are going to be coming off the land." Now, she says, forest plans are focused more on long-term outcomes like forest health goals and wildlife habitat — things that were already being done but were not addressed in the forest plan in the way they can be now.

"All of us who work on the plan love the forest. It's why we enjoy our work and why we think it's so important and such an incredible opportunity to do this work and to help chart the path to the future," Aldridge says.

## Mountain Bikes and Wilderness

The path to the forests' future hasn't been without bumps, however. Stemming from a 1984 Forest Service decision banning mountain bikes in wilderness areas, an ongoing debate between wilderness advocates and

*Continued on next page*



**Recreation in Nantahala-Pisgah**  
**(l-r):** Volunteers ride on horseback to clear debris on the Woods Mountain Trail. Photo by Deirdre Perot. Aron Smith speeds by on a mountain bike. Photo by Cecilio Ricardo/USFS. Backpackers pose near a swimming hole in the Linville Gorge Wilderness Area. Photo courtesy of Maeve Gould

## Pisgah-Nantahala Plan

*Continued from previous page*

mountain bikers on wilderness land designation reared its head in late 2015. Wilderness areas are considered the gold standard of conservation. Agencies can recommend areas of federal land for this special status, but creating new wilderness requires an act of Congress and the president's signature.

Five areas in the two forests are designated as wilderness study areas, parcels of land that are recommended by the Forest Service to be wilderness and largely managed as such, but have yet to receive congressional designation. Pisgah's Lost Cove and Harper Creek Wilderness Study Areas are particularly valued by mountain bikers and conservationists.

In December 2015, a coalition of outdoor recreation and wilderness advo-

cacy groups signed a Memorandum of Understanding. It recommended nearly 110,000 acres — including three current wilderness study areas — for wilderness designation, excluding existing mountain bike trails. However, the memorandum also proposed removing the Forest Service's wilderness recommendations from Lost Cove and Harper Creek in favor of creating a 57,400-acre "Grandfather National Recreation Area." National recreation areas are federally protected and can contain wilderness areas, but need to be approved by Congress.

The proposal ultimately crumbled after backlash from wilderness advocates like John Wilson. While many wilderness advocates would like to see a

Grandfather National Recreation Area with Lost Cove and Harper Creek established as wilderness areas, they felt there was little hope of one being approved under the Republican-controlled Congress. If the Forest Service removes its recommendation for wilderness designation, Congress could more easily pass a bill to strip Lost Cove and Harper Creek of their wilderness study area status and even open it to logging.

In March, U.S. Sen. Greg Gianforte (R-MT) proposed a bill to nullify the wilderness study area status of nearly 700,000 acres of public land in Montana, signifi-

ing the possibility for similar bills affecting more states or even the entire nation.

"We have so little wilderness in North Carolina,"

Wilson wrote in an email. "Less than one third of one percent of North Carolina's land area is designated wilderness. For example, the Harper Creek and Lost Cove [Wilderness Study Areas] are only one percent of the 1.25 million acres of national forests in North Carolina."

Paul Stahlschmidt — a co-signer of the memorandum and current board member of the Northwest North Carolina Mountain Bike Alliance, a nonprofit mountain biking association — says that mountain bikers are underserved in some areas.

"The Grandfather Ranger District [which contains Lost Cove and Harper Creek] as a whole only has 21 percent of its trails open to bikes," Stahlschmidt wrote in an email. "That is 57 miles out of 267."

According to Wilson, many individuals and conservation organizations

*Continued on page 21*

## Forest Plan Q&A

We asked several stakeholders in the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan what they most want to see from the new plan. Read their responses at

[appvoices.org/forest-plan](http://appvoices.org/forest-plan)

## Where Does Your Forest Stand with the Plan?

By Locke Curtis

Beneath the bureaucracy of the national forest planning process lies a valuable opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions on the future of public land.

In 1976, Congress passed the National Forest Management Act to find sustainable, productive ways to utilize forest land while also protecting its beauty and creating public green spaces.

This act requires national forests to develop a plan every 15 years — budget permitting — for how the land will be used in the future and undergo a public comment period. The plan initiatives often include safeguarding native plant diversity, protecting air quality and watersheds, and determining the extent of timber harvesting as well as other government and private projects.

In 2012, the Obama administration revised the planning rule to expand the focus

from commodity production to further emphasize long-term ecological sustainability and increase community involvement.

In North Carolina, the forest planning process for the **Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests** is underway. Here is an update on where the other national forests in the Appalachian region are in their planning process:

Pennsylvania's **Allegheny National Forest** revised its plan in 2007 after five years of public collaboration.

Georgia's **Chattahoochee National Forest** revised its plan in 2004. It is due for revision in 2019, but the forest service is uncertain about the next start date. This July, the forest published a Monitoring and Evaluation Report to assess progress in the implementation of the 2004 plan.

Tennessee's **Cherokee National Forest** completed its last plan in 2004. In an email, Public Affairs Officer Terry McDonald wrote that, "under normal circumstances,

the plan would be up for revision in 2019, but the agency is behind schedule for many reasons (budget, new rule, etc.)." McDonald stated that they will likely initiate the next plan between 2024 and 2026.

**Daniel Boone National Forest** in Kentucky completed its last plan in 2004 and the next is scheduled for 2024. Forest staff are currently revising their plan to include new scientific information on the endangered Indiana bat population.

The **George Washington National Forest**, which is primarily in Virginia and also crosses into West Virginia, revised its forest plan in 2014. The plan increased stream protection buffers, opened more land to potential logging and recommended areas for wilderness and national scenic designation.

The **Jefferson National Forest**, which spans portions of Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky, revised its plan in 2004. The revision of the Jefferson Forest Plan is not

scheduled in the immediate future.

**Monongahela National Forest** in West Virginia completed its last plan in 2006 and will be due for another revision in 2021.

In South Carolina, **Sumter National Forest** planning finished in 2004. While under the law they should begin their next plan in 2019, Sumter is currently sixth in a queue for funding and personnel, according to forest staff, so they estimate starting the next revision in 2024 or 2026.

Ohio's **Wayne National Forest** completed its plan in 2006. The forest held eight meetings in the spring of 2018 to include the public in the beginning stages of planning. Rewriting is scheduled to begin in April 2019. The forest service says they intend to announce more public meeting dates as soon as August 2018 on the forest's website. Among other topics, the next plan will address controversial oil and gas fracking in the forest.



# A Journey Through the Daniel Boone National Forest

Stunning rock formations, the Red River Gorge, a colorful history and many rare species highlight this Eastern Kentucky forest

By Hannah Gillespie

With its signature red cliffs, deep hemlock groves, sky-spanning stone arches and towering hardwood trees, the Daniel Boone National Forest receives its fair share of visitors annually. The more than 708,000-acre forest is composed of four districts in Eastern Kentucky and is a popular destination for outdoor adventure and experiencing nature.

“We need the Daniel Boone and other national forests to be a place of solace, a place of respite, a place of peace,” says Dave Cooper, a Lexington, Ky., resident who visits the Daniel Boone once a week. “We don’t always look at what the forest provides to us in terms of clean air, clean water, wildlife habit and just a place to unwind.”

But the protection of these treasured areas did not happen overnight. The forest today is the result of decades of decisions and actions — some controversial — by Daniel Boone National Forest staff, government officials, environmental groups and volunteers.

## History of the Forest

The early 1900s brought the passage of legislation that allowed the relatively new U.S. Forest Service to purchase land. On February 23, 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt designated the Cumberland Purchase Unit in Kentucky as the Cumberland National Forest, which acquired 336,692 acres by June of that year. At the time, the forest proclamation boundary — the land the Forest Service can purchase without congressional permission — spanned 1.3 million acres and was home to 8,000 families.

According to Robert Collins, former forest supervisor of the Cumberland National Forest and author of “A History of the Daniel Boone National Forest,” some of these families were offered cash payments for their land, while others “were given permission to occupy and cultivate a small portion of the land in return for protecting the property.”

“Originally [the forest] was mostly purchases from large corporate landholders, timber companies that had cut all the timber off and coal companies

that had mined all the easy coal to get,” says London District Ranger Jason Nedlo. “Those companies were essentially moving on to other areas so the government bought those lands from them.”

Through multiple acquisitions, the forest expanded throughout the decades and was renamed the Daniel Boone National Forest in 1966.

Coal mining and oil and gas drilling on what is now Daniel Boone National Forest began in the 1800s. In one particularly contentious chapter, in 1953 the Stearns Coal and Lumber Company requested to strip mine for coal a 47,000-acre tract of the Cumberland National Forest. The Forest Service had purchased surface rights to the tract from the Stearns Company in 1937, but the company still owned the mineral rights, according to Collins’ history of the forest.

But the following January, the Regional Forester declined the company’s request — and declined it again when the company proposed the project for the second time in 1954. This controversy attracted national attention, as individu-



als across the country protested strip mining in the Cumberland National Forest. In a 1955 victory for mine op-

ponents, the Department of Agriculture upheld the Forest Service’s decision.

In 1977, Congress prohibited surface mining of coal on federal lands, so only underground coal mining is currently allowed in the national forest. As of January 1, 2003, there were three active coal leases and three requests for new and modified leases. Updated mining information was not available at press time.

“There’s still a legacy from [mining],” says Nedlo. “We have a lot of acres with super-compacted soil where grass and nothing else will grow there. We also have acid mine drainage in a lot of areas [that results in] extremely low pH water in creeks and streams.”

According to the 2004 Forest Plan, the demand for minerals from the Daniel Boone negatively impacts air and water quality with particulate matter and acid



Parts of the Redbird Crest Trail, at top, would be rerouted for a large timber project. Photo courtesy of Kentucky Heartwood. A fallen tree, left, along Daniel Boone’s Scutterhole Trail. Above, an oil drum filled with litter on the side of Forest Road 193. Photos by Hannah Gillespie

mine drainage. As of 2015, there were also 49 abandoned oil and gas wells.

Excluding those abandoned wells, there were 1,626 oil or gas wells in the forest as of March 2015, 1,166 of which were private and 460 of which were federal.

Of the Daniel Boone National Forest’s 708,800 surface acres, the federal government owns the subsurface mineral rights to 177,000 acres — and 35 percent of that is leased. The remaining roughly 531,000 acres of underground mineral rights are privately owned.

Mineral extraction is far from the only contentious chapter in the forest’s history.

In 1962, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed to dam the Red River to prevent flooding downstream and damage to property, crops and livestock at the request of local residents. Initial studies estimated that 2,000 acres of national forest land would be flooded at pool level and about 8,000 acres affected by management and use of the reservoir.

In August of 1967, the Cumberland Chapter of the Sierra Club voiced their formal opposition to the project “on the grounds that development within the Red River Gorge would destroy the scenic and natural values of that area,” according to Collins. Yet the study conducted by Daniel Boone National Forest staff showed no major impact on the ecology, scenic value, sport fishery, water quality or future development. This created a major controversy between local citizens, who had thought the dam would be constructed soon, and the Sierra Club.

Although the Daniel Boone National Forest supported the proposed dam,

Continued on next page

## Daniel Boone NF

Continued from previous page

in 1969, the governor of Kentucky announced he would not approve construction at the original site, and it was never constructed.

Also in the late ‘60s, the Forest Service acquired the 60,000-acre Redbird Purchase Unit from Red Bird Timber Corporation. Much of this land was previously owned by Fordson Coal Company. The Forest Service sought the land to protect the headwaters of the Kentucky River, as much of the state’s Bluegrass region depends on the river for water.

Since this area became part of the national forest, significant improvements to soil, water and land have occurred, according to a July 2018 statement issued by Daniel Boone National Forest staff.

## Protecting Natural Wonders

Towards the end of the 20th century, several government actions increased protections for some of the forest’s significant land and water features.

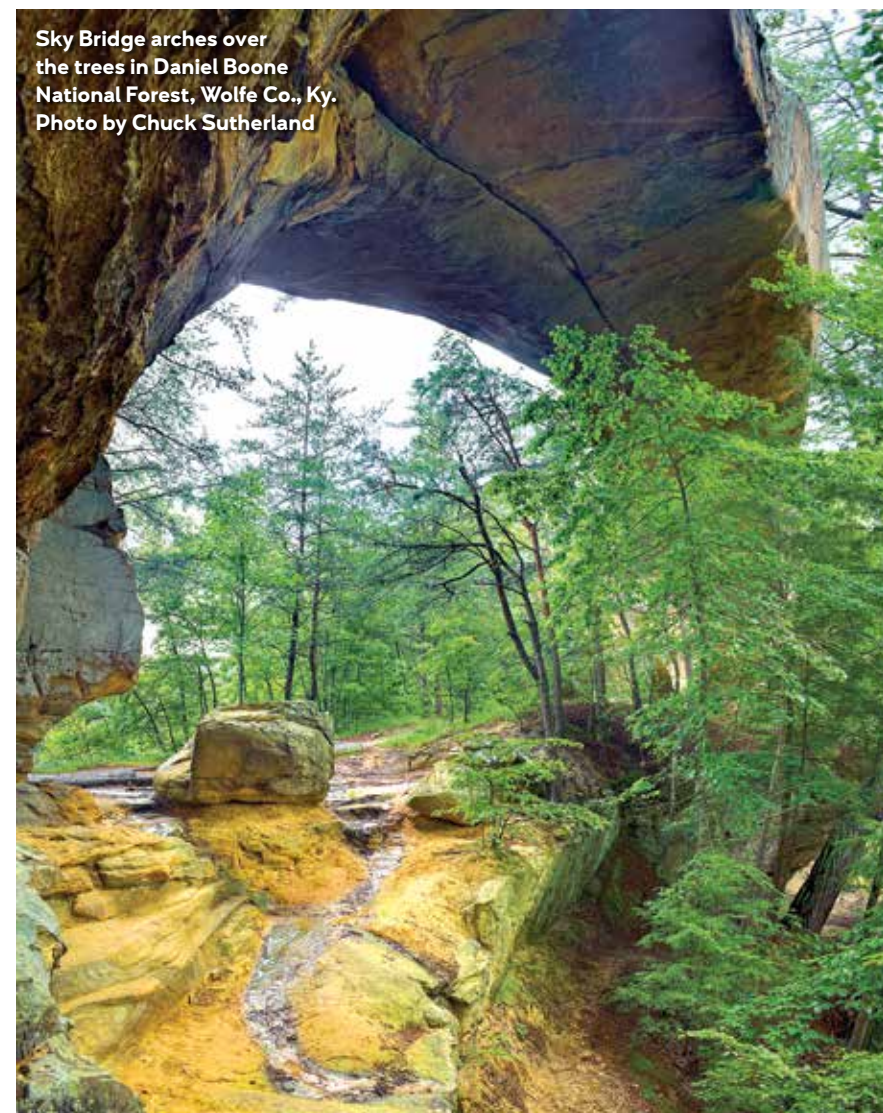
In 1993, Congress granted National Wild and Scenic River status to 19.4 miles of the Red River within the national forest. Congress also designated nearly 18,000 acres of the Daniel Boone National Forest as wilderness areas — undeveloped zones with the highest level of conservation protection. Clifty Wilderness in the Red River Gorge and Beaver Creek Wilderness in the Stearns Ranger District are known for rugged terrain with breathtaking views, sandstone cliffs, natural arches, stream valleys and hemlock groves.

“[The Daniel Boone National Forest has] a tremendous amount of biodiversity essentially because it’s a canyon-type landscape,” says Jim Scheff, director of the nonprofit forest advocacy organization Kentucky Heartwood.

The striking scenic areas in Daniel Boone National Forest are formed by eroded sandstone and result in the cliffs, gorges, rock shelters, waterfalls, natural bridges, arches and caves that provide habitat to plant and animal species.

“In terms of describing something that makes the Daniel Boone unique and really special, I think it really derives from that geology and geography that then creates this space for a richness of diversity that you wouldn’t otherwise expect,” says Scheff.

The Clifty Wilderness alone contains



Sky Bridge arches over the trees in Daniel Boone National Forest, Wolfe Co., Ky. Photo by Chuck Sutherland

750 types of flowering plants and 170 species of moss, as well as endangered, threatened or rare plants and animals. The Daniel Boone National Forest also shelters at-risk plants such as the rare Lucy Braun’s snakeroot, the endangered Cumberland sandwort and running buffalo clover and the threatened Virginia spiraea and white fringeless orchid. The forest’s caves and rivers are home to 18 species of endangered animals and four species of threatened animals, which include bats, fish and mussels.

These forests also host invasive species that pose a major threat to native trees; the hemlock wooly adelgid, the bark beetle and more recently the emerald ash borer. While infected trees can be treated with pesticide if caught early enough, this is a costly procedure.

## Current Projects

Addressing invasive species is just one topic included in the forest’s long-term plan. Roughly every 15 years, national forests undergo a planning process to set desired future conditions and provide broad guidance for upcoming projects.

The most recent forest plan for the Daniel Boone National Forest came out in 2004. Among other changes, the plan proposed two Research Natural Areas, prohibited camping in rock shelters to protect archeological resources, and included plans to restore watersheds and improve soil productivity and air quality.

The plan set seasonal restrictions on logging projects in an effort to protect bat populations that were being adversely affected by the contagious and fatal disease white-nose syndrome, which, in 2004, was new to Eastern Kentucky. According to Nedlo, new research proves the forest plan was too restrictive. In February 2018, the agency proposed an amendment to the plan that would loosen some of those limitations.

The proposal was met with criticism by many in the environmental community. Scheff states that removing these restrictions would weaken protections for the Indiana bat and increase the scale of logging in the forest. In a March 2018 public comment to the Daniel Boone National Forest, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Kentucky Field Office states, “If the action

is carried out as proposed, an increase in adverse effects on federally-listed species is anticipated.” A decision on the amendment was not made at press time.

According to Nedlo, increasing commercial timber harvest on the Daniel Boone creates different habitat types (see page 8).

“We feel that commercial timber harvest is an important tool that allows us to get a lot of other beneficial work done,” says Nedlo, noting that proceeds from timber sales can help fund stream restoration, invasive species removal, rare plant management and cleaning up abandoned mine lands. “And the benefit to timber harvest is it’s essentially a man-made disturbance so it gets a lot more light on the ground.”

In February of 2018, the agency proposed the South Redbird and Pine Creek timber projects, which would log a total of over 7,000 acres. The public comment periods for both projects ended in April and May, respectively.

In October of 2017, the Greenwood project was approved. It was proposed at 2,500 acres, which was the forest’s largest logging project in the past decade at the time, according to Scheff.

“One of the problems we have with [the Greenwood] project was that that particular landscape area actually has a number of small areas that have fairly high diversity of regionally and state rare floral that we would consider prairie type plants; things that need a fairly persistent open forest structure and not the type of structure that’s created by logging,” says Scheff.

“As part of [Kentucky Heartwood’s] advocacy and work through the objection process some of the logging was reduced and there was some beneficial changes to their herbicide plans,” says Scheff. Now the group is working with the Forest Service and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission to thoroughly survey specific areas.

In 2012, Kentucky Heartwood successfully urged the Forest Service to withdraw the Crooked Creek Project, a timber harvest that would have impacted the regionally important Climax Spring and the Little Egypt area.

“We documented a fair amount of old growth in some county record plant species including the second-oldest dated shortleaf pine in the country all in this timber area,” says Scheff.

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Auxier Ridge Trail. Photo by Kerry Mark Leibowitz



## Georgia

### Raven Cliff Falls

#### Chattahoochee National Forest

☎ (770) 297-3000

Chattahoochee National Forest in Helen, Ga. shelters a lush forest, moss-lined trout stream and a beautiful waterfall for those willing to find it.

The Raven Cliff Falls Trail is a moderate, out-and-back hike that is great for families and dogs. The trail, which is 2.5 miles each way, begins at the parking area and follows Dodd Creek upstream through the Raven Cliff Wilderness. Two miles in, the sound of rushing water is evident as the falls become visible through angled, 40-foot-tall granite cliffs.

Free camping is available along the trail on a first-come first-serve basis, with some stream-side campsites located close to the parking area and several backpacking sites scattered along

the creek's banks. As they are user-created, not all campsites follow the Leave No Trace Principle of camping more than 200 feet away from water.

The 150-foot Dukes Creek Falls is located nearby. Its parking lot — which costs \$4 per day — also offers incredible views of the rocky summit of Yonah Mountain. Less than one mile into the trail, there is a wheelchair-accessible viewing platform. The falls can be reached through a moderate, two-mile out-and-back trail. — H.G.

## Kentucky

### Auxier Area Trails

#### Daniel Boone National Forest

☎ (606) 663-8100

Daniel Boone National Forest's Red River Gorge Geological Area is a popular recreation destination for hiking, canoeing, rock climbing, hunting and fishing. This area is spectacular in its natural sandstone cliffs and rock formations.

The Auxier Ridge Trail near Slade, Ky., leads hikers 2.1 miles along a narrow ridge that ends with sweeping views of the gorge, including Haystack Rock, Auxier Branch and the Double Arch. From here, hikers can follow the Courthouse Rock Trail through forests and across streams. This leads back to the Auxier Ridge Trail and the parking area for a total of three miles.

For a longer loop, from the Auxier Ridge Trail, hikers can access the Auxier Branch Trail at a fork where it joins with the Courthouse Rock Trail. This trail is lined with ferns, poplar and beech trees and seasonal wildflowers. From this trail, follow the 4.4-mile Double Arch Trail. Hikers can take this trail to Double Arch for a scenic overlook or head straight for the parking area. This hike is roughly 7.5 miles.

Backcountry camping requires a permit, which costs \$3 per day, \$5 for three days or \$30



Raven Cliff Falls. Photo courtesy of Atlanta Trails/ atlantatrails.com

## Journey with us...

...through the spectacular state and national forests our region has to offer.

Unlike national parks, which focus on preservation of natural areas as well as visitor enjoyment and education, national forests are managed for many purposes — such as timber, grazing, conservation, wildlife and fisheries in addition to recreation. There are 11 national forests in the Central and Southern Appalachian Mountains, and many more state forests. These state forests are also managed for multiple purposes, and some offer recreation opportunities.

U.S. Forest Service data shows that the number of visits to national forests have increased from roughly 142.5 million visits in 2005 to 148 million in 2016. Eighty-four percent of national forest visitors traveled for recreation, largely for hiking or walking. Visitors come from near and far; people who traveled under 25 miles to the national forest averaged 33 percent of visits, while 15 percent of visitors traveled from over 500 miles.

When visiting these beautiful spaces, be wary of climbing around waterfalls, and practice Leave No Trace principles, which provide guidance on how to avoid human-created impacts to the

annually, and can be obtained through payment envelopes on-site. — H.G.

### Little Shepherd Trail

#### Kentonia State Forest

☎ (502) 564-4496

Kentonia State Forest is the oldest state forest in Kentucky, having been gifted to the state by the Kentonia-Cantron Corporation in 1919. Located in Harlan County, there are seven scattered parcels which total 4,081 acres along the south side of Pine Mountain.

The Little Shepherd Trail, which is best for vehicle travel, starts at U.S. 119 and ends at U.S. 421. It is a 38-mile narrow, winding road that traverses the crest of Pine Mountain. A portion of this road runs through Kentonia State Forest. Offering stunning views, some overlooks on the Little Shepherd Trail allow visitors to see both sides of Pine Mountain.



Little Shepherd Trail. Photo by Jamie Middleton

# Hidden Treasures

## Part 6: National Forests

By Sara Crouch and Hannah Gillespie



natural world. Especially be sure to dispose of waste properly so that each visitor to these public places can experience them in all their splendor.

Over the years, *The Appalachian Voice* has explored a wide array of the marvelous and wonderful hidden treasures of Appalachia. Visit [appvoices.org/hiddentreasures](http://appvoices.org/hiddentreasures) to explore them all.

This road features broad vistas, rhododendron and mountain laurel and views of rocky, narrow ridges with steep slopes called hogbacks.

Only parts of this road are paved, so vehicles without 4-wheel drive may not be able to make the entire 38-mile trip. Though rocky at times, visiting the Little Shepherd Trail is worth experiencing the views and history embedded along the ridges of Pine Mountain. — S.C.

## Maryland

### Poplar Lick Trail

#### Savage River State Forest

☎ (301) 895-5759

At over 54,000 acres, Grantsville's Savage River State Forest is the largest state forest in Maryland and an outdoor enthusiast's paradise with designated areas for hiking, camping, fishing, hunting and off-road vehicles.

The Poplar Lick Trail is a moderate 6-mile path on the remains of a 1934 Civilian Conservation Corps roadway that offers hiking, biking and primitive camping. Backpackers must obtain a permit from the Savage River State Forest Office for \$10 a day. Camping is also available at Big Run and New Germany state parks within Savage River State Forest.



The Savage River. Photo by Joey Beall / Wikipedia Creative Commons

In warmer weather, rhododendron and wildflower blossoms are prominent. The Poplar Lick Trail follows a native trout stream and ends at the Savage River.

On the trail is a stone monument memorializing the five-person crew of a B-52 bomber that crashed during a blizzard at Big Savage Mountain on Jan. 13, 1964. The plane was carrying two thermonuclear bombs. A week into the search for the plane and crew, Air Force Maj. Robert Lee Payne was found dead from exposure after ejection in the Savage River State Forest. The monument marks this tragic spot.

In Grantsville and Salisbury, similar markers are located where two other crew members were found dead. Over 50 years later, these memorials are still visited by the crews' families, Air Force members and citizens. — H.G.



Harper Creek Falls. Photo by Jeff Clark

## North Carolina

### Harper Creek Falls

#### Pisgah National Forest

☎ (828) 759-0005

In the Harper Creek Wilderness Study Area of Pisgah National Forest near Collettsville, N.C., the 50-foot Harper Creek Falls cascades over slanted rocks.

One way to see the falls is through a fairly easy 1.75-mile hike on the Harper Creek Trail. When the trail splits, take the Raider Camp trail on the left, and go left again to see Harper Creek Falls from above. There is an unofficial scramble trail to the base of the falls and a popular swimming hole. Another side-trail scramble requires utilizing an old climbing rope that could be in poor condition to reach a pool between the second and third tier of the falls. Please exercise extreme caution and do not bring small children or dogs.

For a longer trek, follow the Mountains to Sea Trail north from the Harper Creek Falls overlook. From here on, there will be several creek crossings. Turn left at the next four junctions. When you reach the fifth fork, keep straight to access a cliff overlook with spectacular views of South Harper Creek Falls and Grandfather Mountain. Retrace your steps back to the Mountains to Sea Trail. This loop is 10.9 miles. A detailed Wilson Creek Area map and strong navigation skills are recommended.

There are several primitive campsites along the path. — H.G.

### Wayah Bald

#### Nantahala National Forest

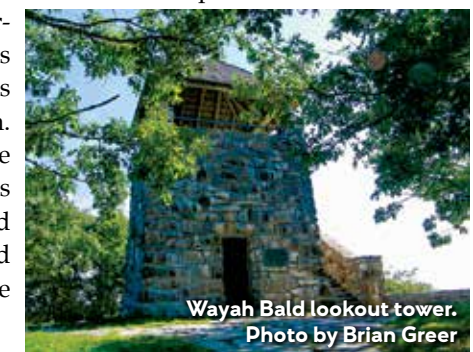
☎ (828) 524-6441

Just outside of Franklin, N.C., in the Nantahala National Forest is Wayah Bald. With an elevation of 5,342 feet, the bald's elevation offers beautiful views stretching to the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and into Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina.

The Wayah Bald is an accessible, family-friendly recreation option with picnic tables and a paved path leading to the lookout tower.

For many, the attraction to Wayah Bald is the 53-foot lookout tower built in 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Climbing to the top of this tower reveals stunning views of the southern Appalachian Mountains. There are signs on the tower with historical information about the structure and the surrounding mountains it was built to protect from wildfire. The Appalachian Trail and the Bartram Trail also cross the bald near the tower.

For more adventure, stop at the Wilson Lick Ranger Station first. Built in 1913, this ranger station was the first in the Nantahala National Forest. Today it features an information kiosk with the history of the ranger station, area forestry and Wayah Bald. From there, you can hike three miles northbound on the Appalachian Trail to the Wayah Bald Lookout Tower. — S.C.



Wayah Bald lookout tower. Photo by Brian Greer

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## Ohio

### Monroe Outlook

#### Wayne National Forest

☎ (740) 753-0101

Just outside Glouster, Ohio, in Wayne National Forest lies an area known for panoramic views and wildlife watching.

The Monroe Outlook is close to the parking lot and offers 360-degree views for bird-watching or seeing wildflowers and fall foliage, depending on the season. Nearby is the Monroe Overlook Trail, a 1.5-mile trail developed for walkers to view wildlife in early successional habitats, which contains grasses, shrubs and tree saplings. Animals such as ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, black bears, rabbits and white-tailed deer may be found in this area.

For those looking for a longer and more difficult hike, the nearby Wildcat Hollow Hiking Trail offers both a five-mile loop and a 15-mile loop, which can be combined for an extended backpacking trip. Dispersed camping is allowed along the scenic trail, which offers streams, meadows and tall pines. Burr Oak State Park is also nearby and a popular destination for outdoor recreation, including hiking and camping. — H.G.



Wildcat Hollow Trail near Monroe Overlook. Photo by Gary Chancey



Yellow Branch Falls. Photo by Mark Oleg Ozboyd, Southeast Nature Society

## South Carolina

### Yellow Branch Falls & Other Waterfalls

#### Sumter National Forest

☎ (864) 638-9568

The Andrew Pickens Ranger District of Sumter National Forest in Oconee County, S.C., contains multiple gorgeous waterfalls.

Yellow Branch Falls Trail, a moderately difficult three-mile round-trip path, leads to its namesake waterfall, a 50-foot scenic cascade.

The Andrew Pickens district is also home to Brasstown Falls, Big Bend Falls, King Creek Falls, Lee Falls, Long Creek Falls, Fall Creek Falls, Opossum Creek Falls, Pigpen Falls, Riley Moore Falls, Spoonauger Falls, Miuka Falls, Station Cove Falls and Station Creek Falls.

Still looking for an adventure in the area? Stumphouse Tunnel Park, which features Issaqueena Falls and Stumphouse Tunnel, is located just outside the national forest. Note that the park closes at 5 p.m.

Local legends and an 1898 poem say that the 200-foot Issaqueena Falls is named for a Cherokee woman who warned white settlers of an impending attack. To escape pursuing American Indians, she appeared to jump over the falls, but Issaqueena was actually hiding behind the falls and survived.

Great views of the cascading Issaqueena Falls can be accessed quickly through the viewing platform or a steep hike down to its base. — H.G.

## Tennessee

### Tennessee Gulf Trail

#### Martha Sundquist State Forest

☎ (423) 625-4092

Martha Sundquist State Forest, which was added to the Tennessee state forest system in 2001, is home to the out-and-back Tennessee Gulf Trail, which is 3.5 miles each way.

The fairly flat Tennessee Gulf Trail offers visitors a pleasant hike through rhododendron and magnolia trees along the Gulf Fork of Big Creek in Cocke County. The trail crosses the Big Creek several times via rustic eastern hemlock bridges, two of which are named for people who were instrumental in the acquisition of the forest and construction of the trail.

Of Tennessee's 15 state forests, Martha Sundquist is one of the few with a designated hiking trail, a true treasure for the state. In recent years, staff at the Martha Sundquist State Forest and the U.S. Forest Service linked the Tennessee Gulf Trail to the Appalachian Trail near Brown's Gap. In addition, the state for-



Tennessee Gulf Trail, Martha Sundquist State Forest archives

est is surrounded on three sides by the Cherokee National Forest, making it possible to turn the Tennessee Gulf Trail from a great day hike into much more.

The Tennessee Gulf Trail has an upper and a lower trailhead. Four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended for the lower trailhead, which requires a stream crossing. There are also six primitive campsites in the forest. — S.C.

### Unicoi Turnpike Trail

#### Cherokee National Forest

☎ (423) 261-2286

The Coker Creek Area of the Cherokee National Forest is home to a section of one of the oldest trails in North America, the Unicoi Turnpike. While much of the approximately 67-mile trail stretching across North Carolina and Tennessee has faded, a 2.5-mile stretch has been restored inside Cherokee National Forest so people can walk in the footsteps of history.

According to the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association, this road was used by the Cherokee Nation as early as the 1600s, and possibly much earlier. The state commissioned the trail as a commercial turnpike in 1816. It was later used as a portion of the Trail of Tears when the Cherokee Nation was forcibly removed from their homeland.

In 1999, the White House Millennium Council named the Unicoi Turnpike one of 16 National Millennium Trails, which the council described as "trails of national significance."

To experience and pay respect to the storied and complex history of the Unicoi Turnpike Trail, visit the Coker Creek Welcome Center in Tellico Plains, Tenn., three miles from the trailhead. Inside the welcome center you will find brochures with historical information about the area and opportunities for more outdoor experiences like panning for gold and hiking to Coker Creek Falls. — S.C.



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Unicoi Turnpike Trail. Wikimedia Commons

# Oil and Gas Drilling in Appalachia's National Forests

By Molly Moore

Public lands are no exception to oil and gas companies' footprint in Appalachia. A U.S. Forest Service map showing where oil and gas resources overlap with national forests reveals that the fuels can be found beneath six national forests in Central Appalachia: Allegheny, Monongahela, Wayne, Daniel Boone, George Washington and Jefferson.

Some of the oil and gas wells in national forests date back to the early and mid-20th century, and some even predate the forest's status as federal land. Most use conventional vertical drilling techniques, which are generally less controversial than the newer horizontal fracking wells but can still bring negative environmental impacts. Yet there are now also some fracking wells in the region's public forests. These types of wells have been linked to water contamination, air pollution and health problems.

Mineral extraction is allowed on public lands, but it can be restricted. The George Washington National Forest prohibits drilling on 99 percent of its 1.1 million acres, according to the agency, which released a statement saying "Historically, the GWNF has never been a supplier of natural gas and there has been no interest in exploring or developing GWNF lands."

In situations where the mineral rights are privately owned and the Forest Service is simply the surface owner, the agency cannot block the private owner's access to their minerals for what the Forest Service deems "an unreasonable amount of time."

Other drilling restrictions can vary. For instance, the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia prohibits drilling wells in wetlands and requires that oil and gas activities do not "block or



An oil and gas well in Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest. Photo by Scott Stoleson, USDA Forest Service

obliterate trails or campsites," but permits rerouting trails to accommodate drilling. Mineral rights are privately owned in 38 percent of the Monongahela National Forest. The agency cites 60 active wells as of 2018, all of which are conventional.

Allegheny National Forest has the highest percentage of privately owned mineral rights among Appalachian forests at 93 percent. There

are currently 12,000 conventional wells and 11 fracking wells in the forest, according to the Forest Service. In contrast, just 12 percent of mineral rights in the Jefferson National Forest are privately owned. According to the agency, as of 2014, there were 88 active conventional wells, 80 of which were private.

As of June 2015, 59 percent of the mineral rights in Wayne National Forest were privately owned and there were 1,273 active oil and gas wells, all of which used conventional vertical drilling methods. But a 2012 Forest Service decision opened up the Wayne to potential horizontal fracking wells, and in 2016 the Bureau of Land Management began auctioning drilling leases that permit fracking. As of February 2018, the BLM had auctioned 2,300 acres of fracking leases in the Wayne National Forest. Lease owners have 10 years to develop their wells, and information about how many fracking wells are currently active was not available at press time.

## As the Climate Changes, Our National Forests Must Adapt

By Locke Curtis

American national forests play a crucial role in slowing the effects of climate change, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Not only do forests offset about 10 percent of America's carbon production, they provide water filtration, clean air, erosion protection and biodiversity to the surrounding areas.

Climate change scientists across the country are compiling data on temperature, rainfall and wildlife in order to anticipate coming challenges for forests and respond appropriately. While climate change prediction models do not agree about the future effects of climate change, most foresee extreme patterns of rainfall and drought resulting from an increase in average temperature.

In 2009, public and private forest stakeholders in the Northern United States established the Climate Change Response Framework in an effort to share climate change data and solutions across 246 million acres in 19 states, including 14 national forests. The information-sharing framework has three main objectives: to provide a

forum for experiences and knowledge to be shared publicly, to create tools to help private and public landowners manage vulnerable forest ecosystems, and to support efforts to implement adaptive responses to climate change.

In West Virginia, staff from the Monongahela National Forest used the framework's resources to help develop a project focused on restoring native red spruce populations to a former strip mining site for erosion control.

In the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, staff are working on several projects related to climate change. Forest officials are creating habitats for the amphibian species that are most vulnerable to rising ambient temperatures. In addition, efforts are being made to restore and reinforce vegetation in wetland areas susceptible to the increased threat of flooding.

Efforts like these that anticipate and prepare for climate change are taking place in national forests across the country. To find out how your local forest is responding, contact forest staff or visit their website.

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Continued from page 18

## Virginia

### Mount Pleasant George Washington National Forest

☎ (540) 291-2188

In the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area of George Washington National Forest near Buena Vista, Va., the summit of Mount Pleasant offers a breathtaking sunrise and sunset destination for hikers and beginning backpackers.

This 4.7-mile loop marked by blue blazes follows the Henry Lanum Memorial Trail, traversing Pompey Mountain before reaching the summit of Mount Pleasant.

Near the summit, two overlooks provide an east-facing and west-facing view. Large, flat rocks serve as perfect seats for the spectacular panorama. However, the westerly summit requires a seven-foot rock scramble. Keep an eye out for rare peregrine falcons.

Note that the U.S. Forest Service rec-



Mount Pleasant. Photo courtesy of Christin Healey

ommends high-clearance vehicles as the road to the trailhead is steep and rocky. For an extended trip, combine with the nearby Appalachian Trail at Cole Mountain for a total of 12 miles.

Also within the Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area, the Old Hotel Trail is a 3.2-mile hike that offers views of surrounding peaks and passes through old rock walls from long-abandoned hog farms. For another extended loop, connect with the Appalachian Trail. — H.G.

### Guest River Gorge Trail

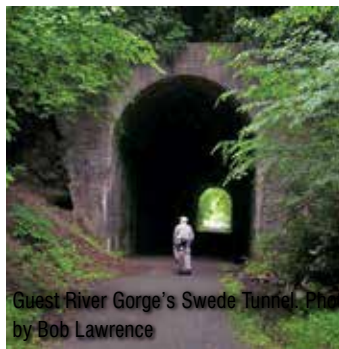
#### Jefferson National Forest

☎ (540) 265-5100

Located within the Jefferson National Forest is the Guest River Gorge Trail, which is 5.9 miles each way. Winding along the Guest River, this out-and-back trail features views of rapids, waterfalls, huge boulders, and sandstone cliffs and outcroppings.

In addition to the natural treasures, this trail meanders through history by taking visitors through the Swede Tunnel, constructed in 1922. The tunnel and trail is a part of the

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nationwide network of hiking and biking trails built on unused or abandoned railway paths. The Guest River Gorge Trail has been reclaimed from the old Norfolk Southern railbed and transformed into a beautiful hike along the Guest River.



Guest River Gorge's Swede Tunnel. Photo by Rob Lawrence

Cranberry Glades, photo by Forest Wander. Sundew (top) and pitcher plants, photos by Rosanna Springston



This trail is not steep, and with a crushed stone surface it is an easy-to-moderate hike and a great option for bikers. Trout fishing, canoeing and kayaking are permitted in the Guest River. — S.C.

## West Virginia

### Spotted Salamander Trail Kanawha State Forest

☎ (304) 558-3500

In the Kanawha State Forest just outside of Charleston, W.Va., is the Spotted Salamander Trail. Named after the most commonly found salamander in the state, this quarter-mile trail was built in 1987 and underwent major renovations in 2016.

A short, paved path, the Spotted Salamander Trail was built to accommodate people with visual and physical impairments. It is wheelchair accessible, and features guide posts and ropes along the edge for the blind as well as interpretive nature stations with braille.

The renovations completed in 2016 include a paved parking area, asphalt trail repairs, new guide posts and ropes, safety fencing and a shelter with a ramp and a wheelchair-accessible picnic table.

Volunteers played a major role in the upgrades. In keeping with that spirit, a volunteer trail maintenance



Spotted Salamander Trail. Photo by Jennifer Bauman

box at the entrance includes a pair of pruners to trim briars that could create a problem for those with visual or physical restrictions.

Guides often lead nature and bird walks along the trail, and its short distance accommodates the whole family. For those looking for a longer or more strenuous adventure, the Wildcat Ridge and Polly trails are very close by. — S.C.

### Cranberry Glades Botanical Area

#### Monongahela National Forest

☎ (304) 653-4826

In Pocahontas County, W.Va., the Cranberry Glades Botanical Area is a true treasure of the Monongahela National Forest, protecting four rare bogs and spanning 750 acres.

These glades support plants and animals that are usually found in more northern latitudes such as cranberries, skunk cabbage and the carnivorous sundew and purple pitcher plants, many of which cannot be found further south than this specific area.

Cranberry Glades is encircled by Cowpasture Trail, a seven-mile hiking trail that offers a closer look at many of the rare plants in this area. Do not step off the trail, as bogs are extremely spongy and ecologically sensitive. For a more accessible option, a half-mile wheelchair-accessible boardwalk goes through two of the bogs.

The Cranberry Mountain Nature Center is nearby and offers a wealth of information about the unique plants and animals in the botanical area. While the boardwalk and trail are open year-round, the nature center is only open from mid-April to mid-October, so be sure to call before stopping in. — S.C. ♦

# Hemp and Medical Cannabis Make Joint Gains

By Kevin Ridder

Farmers across the nation may soon be able to add hemp to their fields. In an effort spearheaded by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the Senate's version of the Farm Bill passed in June with a provision removing hemp from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's controlled substances list. Although the House of Representatives' version of the Farm Bill does not mention hemp, Sen. McConnell is expected to push for its inclusion in the final bill.

"Although it was a foundational part of Kentucky's heritage and today you can buy hemp products at stores across the country, most American farmers have been barred from planting it in their fields," Sen. McConnell said in a press release.

Hemp has been used for thousands of years to create paper, textiles, rope and more. But because hemp is a



Hemp harvest in Monroe County, W.Va. Photo courtesy of West Virginia Farmers Cooperative

close cousin of marijuana and contains miniscule amounts of THC — the psychoactive compound that gets marijuana users high — growing hemp was outlawed in 1970 under the Controlled Substances Act. The 2014 Farm Bill legalized state pilot programs to research growing hemp under 0.3 percent THC.

According to NORML, the National Organization to Reform Marijuana Laws, 40 states have passed legislation authorizing hemp cultivation for

research or commercial purposes, including Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Morgan Leach, CEO of the West Virginia Hemp Farmers Cooperative, says that growing hemp as a cash crop could "revitalize the agricultural economy."

"If you put money in a farmer's pocket, you know where they're going to invest; which is right there on their farm and in their community," Leach says.

Bruce Perlowin, CEO of Hemp, Inc., a hemp processor in Spring Hope, N.C., states that growing hemp is making use of land leveled by mountaintop removal coal mining in Kentucky.

"They're converting old coal territories ... into greenhouses that are going to produce [medical cannabis oil], which is where most of the money is right now in the hemp industry," Perlowin says.

### Virginia Passes Medical Cannabis Oil Law

A former J.C. Penney in Bristol, Va.,

could soon be converted to a medical cannabis growhouse and cannabis oil dispensary if local firm Dharma Pharmaceuticals is awarded one of five state licenses to grow cannabis and sell the extracted oil, according to the Bristol Herald Courier. The five licenses correspond to each of the state's five health districts, and Dharma is competing with eight other applications for the Southwest Virginia district. A decision is expected in mid-August, and the facility would be open by late 2019 if approved.

In March, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam signed a law expanding legal defense of possession of medical cannabis oil from only patients with intractable epilepsy to patients with any diagnosed condition. While this does not make the oil legal, it allows doctors to sign certificates that the patient may present to avoid legal prosecution. Currently, patients have to take specific measures to obtain medical cannabis oil while the state reviews the 49 submitted applications for the five dispensary licenses.

### Daniel Boone NF

Continued from page 15

#### Outdoor Adventure

Another high priority of the Daniel Boone National Forest is sustaining recreation. The forest is a popular destination for a variety of outdoor enthusiasts.

The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources maintains five wildlife management areas to provide species habitat. For hikers and backpackers, the Daniel Boone National Forest provides more than 600 miles of trails. The Sheltoewe Trace National Recreation Trail is a nearly 290-mile trail that spans the Daniel Boone and nearby Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

But the forest is perhaps best known for the Red River Gorge, which is designated as a national geological area, national natural landmark and national archaeological district.

According to Lexington, Ky., resident and Daniel Boone regular Dave Cooper, the gorge "is now an international destination for rock climbers and we're getting hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world coming into Kentucky. We love to have them visit Kentucky and experience what those of us in Kentucky have known for a long time; we have a very beautiful state."

A 2015 study conducted by Eastern Kentucky University researchers found that in the Red River

Gorge, "rock climbers are spending \$3.6 million dollars annually in an area that includes some of the poorest counties in the United States."

"Anecdotally, it seems that tourism and visitation is increasing," says Nedlo, noting that the agency tracks visitor use at a national scale and doesn't have statistics specific to Daniel Boone. He explains that due to budget cuts, the Daniel Boone National Forest operates with less employees than needed.

"The people aren't going away and we still don't want them too," Nedlo says. "But we also don't want them to have a bad experience because of sites in disrepair, a trail is washed out, a campground is filthy or something like that, and so that's the balance we're trying to strike with recreation."

According to Nedlo, volunteers can help with the maintenance of recreation sites. Ultimately, the Daniel Boone National Forest exists as it does today due to the influence of current and past volunteers, administrators, activists, industrialists and more. But most importantly, the Daniel Boone is open to the public for everyone to have their own experience.

"If I have something that's troubling me or a problem that I can't seem to work out in my mind, I take my dog, put her on the leash and we go hiking in the Red River Gorge," says Cooper. "I go for a couple of hours and my problems are all solved. I'm able to work out anything that's bothering me. I just go to the woods and that's important." ♦

### Pisgah-Nantahala Plan

Continued from page 13

that want to see Harper Creek and Lost Cove wilderness designations are helping to expand mountain biking opportunities in the Grandfather area outside the two wilderness study areas.

"I don't think wilderness and expanding non-wilderness recreational opportunities are mutually exclusive," Wilson wrote in an email. "Both are so important to our people and to our state's economy. Working together, conservation and recreation advocates can accomplish much more than we can separately. That collaboration is more important than ever given the current political climate."

Stahlschmidt says he supports new wilderness designations that are "accepted by the majority of the public. In locations where other options could serve the public better, gain more support, and continue to protect the land, I support those [other options]." "Mountain bikers are con-

servationists," Stahlschmidt adds. "They go to the forest for the same reasons that hikers and hunters and equestrians and fishermen and others who seek nature, beauty, and solitude. There are certainly some interests that are unique to these groups, but the large majority of interests are similar. It is that which we should all rally behind."

Once the draft forest plan and draft environmental impact statement is released this fall, there will be a 90-day public comment period and a series of public meetings.

"As owners of our national forests, Americans need to be involved in how they're managed," Wilson states. "Public participation is critical in the actual development of plans for our forests, not just reviews of completed drafts. I think the [Forest Service] has made genuine efforts to make this participation possible." ♦



# FIRE Summit: EMBRACING HANDS-ON LEARNING IN KENTUCKY

By Lorelei Goff

When Belfry High School students in Eastern Kentucky tested ground-water in Pike County for a science project, they never expected to discover contaminants in the area's drinking water.

"We didn't go into this saying there was something wrong with the drinking water," says Hannah McCoy, 18. "We found that this drinking water is not really safe."

The students found high levels of barium, sulfate and sodium in some of wells they tested. McCoy and classmate Aryn Adkins, 18, say the contamination could be alleviated if there were federal regulations regarding acceptable contaminant levels in groundwater.

In June, the group traveled to Kolkata, India, to exchange ideas and research with peers working on a similar project there.

The project began after Belfry High



At left, four Belfry High School students stand with their water-testing equipment in Eastern Kentucky. The students sampled water quality at 10 drinking wells, some near coal mines, and found unhealthy levels of certain elements. Through a U.S. Department of State program, the students then traveled to India to present their work at the U.S. Consulate General in Kolkata, India. They also met with Indian students, right, who tested the pH and residual chlorine levels of area river water. Photos courtesy of Dr. Haridas Chandran.



School was chosen by the University of Kentucky to receive water testing equipment as part of a project sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Mission to India that links schools in Kentucky and India to do community-based water quality research and create cultural exchange. Dr. Haridas Chandran, a science teacher at Belfry, wrote in an email that "the successful completion of the

project is due to the experiences that we have gained through the projects that we have received from the Appalachian Renaissance Initiative grants."

The Appalachian Renaissance Initiative, which is funded in part through a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top Grant, includes the twice-yearly Forging Innovation in Rural Education (FIRE) Summits sponsored by Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative.

KVEC's goal is to shift the focus of the classroom away from activities that simply comply with education standards and toward driving innovation in the classroom. The cooperative distributes between 120 and 150 Appalachian Renaissance Initiative grants each year.

KVEC Executive Director Jeff Hawkins says the FIRE Summits offer students, educators and communities tangible reasons to have hope for the future.

"It's really a celebration of what's right about education," Hawkins says. "It's about kids as makers. It's about teachers as inspirers. It's about connecting the passion that a student has innately with a purpose so that they can then advance themselves, but also help others through their own personal advancement."

During the fall FIRE Summit, educators present proposals for grants that provide up to \$1,000 for classroom projects. These micro-investments focus on getting students more engaged and connecting their passion to a purpose.

In the spring, the students and educators meet again for a show-and-tell to share their projects during the spring

FIRE Summit. Other projects funded by the grants during the 2017-2018 school year included powering a blender with a bicycle, detecting cancer using plants and gold nanoparticles, hatching trout to release in streams, monitoring water quality in streams, testing air quality for pollution levels, collaborating with NASA scientists

to plan an experiment on a satellite, and designing and building drones, as well as student publishing projects.

A "health hackathon" held during the summit focused on the opioid crisis. Students created an app that connects residents to local law enforcement to report finding drug paraphernalia. The app pings the location and police respond to collect it. The students also designed a 3D-printed sleeve to drop over a used needle that can be placed in an evidence bag.

Another hackathon project invited high school students to submit anonymously written stories about how opioids and drug use have affected them personally. Sixty of those were compiled into a book that will be published this fall.

This year's event also included "Building It Forward," an ongoing tiny house project. Eight houses were designed and built by students using \$15,000 in grants from the Appalachian Renaissance Initiative. They were auctioned on theholler.org in May and June. Proceeds go back to the school to fund the next year's tiny houses.

"In school systems, there are a lot of things that will come and go with funding," says KVEC Associate Director Dessie Bowling, who founded the Building It Forward project. "That's why we designed this program to be sustainable, because the school gets the money and it goes right back into their budget to build tiny houses year after year."

Building it Forward exemplifies what Hawkins says is KVEC's emphasis on reaching every student to optimize learning.

"It's more hands on," Lee County

Continued on next page

# Out-of-this-World: STUDENTS DEVELOP SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY

By Sara Crouch

In nine Southwest Virginia schools, the new Virginia Space ThinSat Program is stirring excitement among students and teachers alike. Wise County Public Schools is listed as one of 12 lead institutes for this program, meaning they offer guidance and assistance for nine participating schools. Students involved range from fourth-graders to rising seniors.

The program is named after the ThinSat satellite, a slender satellite capable of transmitting data from a relatively low orbit just outside Earth's atmosphere. Student engagement in this program is broken into three phases. In each phase, the students collect data at increasing altitudes. Wise County schools completed phase one and started phase two during the 2017-2018 school year.

Phase 1 included an introduction to sensors and the development of a sensor board. During Phase 2, the students were supplied with an engineering model to install their sensors into. The model was then sent to Indiana to be tethered to a weather balloon, where the Wise County sensors are currently awaiting launch, according to Jane Carter, chemistry and environmental science teacher at Eastside High and the lead mentor for all nine teams in the region. The sensors will reach an

altitude of 90,000 feet on the weather balloon, and send data back to the students.

"At phase 3, we are going into extreme low-Earth orbit, and we will be launching aboard the Antares rocket on Nov. 10, 2018," explains Carter. Once the ThinSats are deployed, they will orbit Earth for approximately five days and transmit more data to the students.

Elle Smith, a rising junior at Central High School, says she is excited to join participating students at Wallops Island, Va., to watch the launch of the rocket with their satellites aboard.

The ThinSat program was created by Virginia Space, a state program established in 1995 to "promote commercial space activity, economic development and aerospace research within the Commonwealth of Virginia," according to the program's website. The program aims to advance science, technology, engineering and math education. Through this program, participants will be able to research the extreme low-Earth orbit region of



A group of high school and elementary students, above, brief U.S. Sen. Mark Warner on their satellite work. The students' ThinSat satellites will be launched on Northrop Grumman's Antares rocket, right. Photos by Tim Cox



space and rapidly test large satellite subsystems at a low cost.

Carter explains that because the students are collecting data and going through a pilot program where even she does not know the expected outcome, they are experiencing true science.

"They're engaged because it's hands-on, and ... there's lots of prob-

lem solving with it, and that's what our kids need," Carter says. "We have a lot of kids who don't want to do anything, and the only reason they go to school is sports," student Elle Smith says. "But now we're turning that around and the reason they want to go to school in the morning is the ThinSat because they know they're gonna make a difference." This program has inspired the students and the educators involved, according to Carter. She says, "For me as an educator, that's the most exciting part ... they're ready to go, they're excited, wanting to explore, see what all is out there and what they can do." "So many times we are stereotyped in this area, and I think the students oftentimes allow that to dictate what they think they can do and where they can go," continues Carter. "[But] they're working on space projects [where] Wise County Schools are listed as a lead institute." ♦

## FIRE Summit

Continued from previous page

Area Technology Center sophomore Brandon McIntosh told Kentucky Living magazine. "Over at the high school, it's a lot of paperwork. Over here it's take a couple of tests and then you're



out here learning hands on, which is how a lot of kids learn better. I'm not a paper and pencil kind of person."

Hawkins says small, sustainable programs, such as Building It Forward, are at the heart of KVEC's goal to help solve the region's big problems by developing many small solutions through long-term educational strategies.

"If we only picked one thing that we would do to improve our communities, that would have to be an awfully big lever and we would have to have an awfully big fulcrum" Hawkins says. "By having a thousand levers and a thousand fulcrums, we can incrementally advance

Each year, teams of Eastern Kentucky students build tiny houses as part of the Building It Forward Project. Students collaborate and learn hands-on skills, and the homes are auctioned to fund the following year's project. Photo courtesy of The Holler.

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# Remaking Downtowns

## CITIES AND TOWNS AIM TO RE-ENERGIZE MAIN STREET

By Dan Radmacher

Across Appalachia, communities are striving to bring new energy to downtowns that have suffered as once-dominant industries have collapsed or moved away, populations have declined and downtown businesses have shuttered.

Roanoke, Va., faced that situation in the 1970s. Its downtown was a seedy, dilapidated place. In a 2016 Politico article about Roanoke's resurgence, Roanoke Times editorial page editor Dwayne Yancey said of downtown in that era, "Decent people didn't go there."

A revitalization effort began in the late 1970s. The City Market Building, a once-bustling indoor marketplace down to its last few vendors, was turned into a food court. The creation of Elmwood Park provided some much-needed public green space. A 1920s building across from the City Market Building was renovated into Center in the Square and became home to several museums and the Mill Mountain Theater.

But in 1982, the Roanoke-headquartered Norfolk & Western Railway merged with the Southern Railway, and the new Norfolk Southern moved its headquarters to Norfolk. Roanoke, which had been a company town for more than a century, suddenly lost its company — and its identity.

The Hotel Roanoke — the iconic

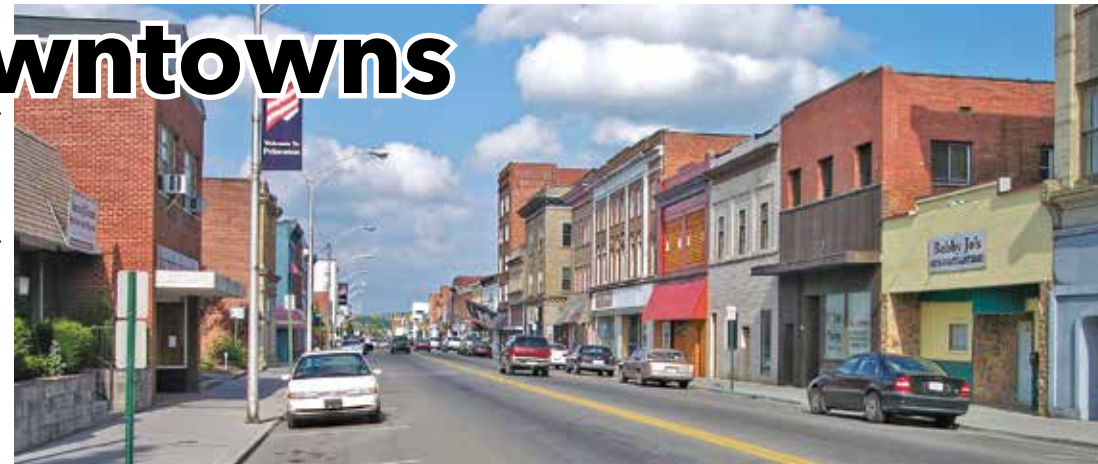
railroad-owned Tudor-style hotel where executives once stayed — was closed. Downtown revitalization efforts stalled. When Darlene Burcham was hired as city manager in 2000, she came to a city she says was mourning the past rather than thinking of the future.

"I felt like the city was stuck in neutral," she says. "Everyone was bemoaning the fact that Norfolk Southern had moved its headquarters rather than looking to the future. The population was declining."

Part of the problem was a lack of attractive housing stock within the city. "I had an assistant city manager who wanted to live in a townhouse or a condo and literally couldn't find one in the city," Burcham says. "One of the first things we did as a city was to jump start the whole housing issue."

The city redeveloped the pair of old Norfolk-Southern office buildings across the railroad tracks from downtown into an adult education center and an apartment building.

Ed Walker, a young lawyer turned real estate developer, began a series of renovations of old commercial buildings into downtown apartments, starting with the Colonial American Bank



West Virginia Route 20 becomes Mercer St. in downtown Princeton, pictured here in 2007. Photo by Tim Kiser

Building that he converted to upscale condominiums, followed by more affordable apartments in the old Grand Piano and Furniture Company. Suddenly, downtown was coming alive not just as a retail, dining and entertainment district, but as a place to live.

The biggest development for Roanoke in recent years is the collaboration between Virginia Tech and Carilion Health Clinic, which partnered to open a medical school in Roanoke in 2010. That has turned into a growing biomedical research institute, creating hundreds of high-paid jobs and attracting talented researchers and physicians while continuing to expand.

According to Richard Rife, a local architect and a member of the city planning commission when the city updated its comprehensive plan in 2000, the establishment of the medical school was "dumb luck" — but luck the city helped bring on itself.

"Maybe we made our luck by having things going in a direction that you could attract the level of people that thing's attracting," he says. "The success of the comprehensive plan was understanding who we are and who we aren't. We weren't trying to be Asheville, but we were trying to be the

best Roanoke we could be."

### A Thriving Downtown

According to Shane Barton, downtown revitalization coordinator for the University of Kentucky's Community and Economic Development Initiative of Kentucky, other communities should look to Roanoke as a model. "If anything, Roanoke has shown the power of creating more connections," he says.

The initiative brought together a team of academic and community specialists to focus on community revitalization in eight counties in Kentucky, according to Barton. Roanoke's city government was often criticized for putting too much emphasis on downtown development, but Barton says in his experience, there's good reason for concentrating efforts in the city center.

"We see downtowns as an intersection of all the things that are important," he says. "They are concentrated places where different aspects of civic life and economic vitality bubble to the surface. Downtown is an opportunity to showcase who we are. They are a reflection of ourselves and how we feel about ourselves — or how people perceive that we feel about ourselves."

Downtowns are uniquely important places, agrees Shaunna Scott, director of the Appalachian Studies Program at the University of Kentucky.

"There's a real value to having public and common spaces where people interact," she says. "There's a center. There's a place where people go. You need spaces for people to interact to do commerce, but also to make art and socialize and break bread together and worship together. That's the thing that builds the social

*Continued on next page*

## Remaking Downtowns

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fabric and creates the social trust that enables your community to thrive and be resilient."

There isn't a cookie-cutter solution to community revitalization, according to Kaycie Stushek, community development network coordinator for the West Virginia Community Development Hub, an organization that works to improve communities in the state. "Every situation is unique, in the people and the history, the attitude, the specific challenges, the relationships, how people work together," she says. "Every single community is at a different spot."

Barton agrees, but says there are some commonalities in what communities need to successfully work toward revitalization.

"You need an engaged and energized team of local folks," he says. "You need to figure out who the cheerleader is, the spark in the community who can advocate for new ideas or bring new ideas to the table."

### Princeton Renaissance

In Princeton, W.Va., that spark was Lori McKinney and her partner and husband Robert Blankenship.

Like Roanoke's downtown in the 1970s, downtown Princeton in the early 2000s was not a place people would take their families at night.

"Mercer Street had been abandoned," says McKinney, co-founder and administrator of The RiffRaff Arts Collective. "A dark element had taken over. But that thoroughfare was a blank canvas. We located a building on the corner of 9th and Mercer and we bought it. We transformed it, turning the bottom floor into an art gallery, the second floor into art studios. We turned the top floor into a beautiful listening room, the Room Upstairs."

Partnering with fellow artist and musician Robert Blankenship, McKinney set out to transform her home town. "I didn't expect to come back home after I graduated," she says. "But I saw West Virginia with new eyes. I could see what the assets were, and I realized you could create wherever you are. What makes a city great is people doing things and making cool things happen."

The RiffRaff was a center of creative energy, but more was going on. McKin-



Top right, one of the 22 murals in Artists' Alley. Photo by Molly Moore. Top left, Princeton, W.Va., community members plant a garden on Mercer St. surrounded by vibrant murals. At left, the city hosts its annual New Year's Eve celebration in the reinvigorated downtown. Photos courtesy of Princeton Renaissance Project.



ney's sister Melissa opened Stages Music School. Working with the West Virginia Community Development Hub, the community launched the Princeton Renaissance Project, bringing together leaders from nonprofits, the Princeton-Mercer Chamber of Commerce, local banks and educational institutions and local government to work together on Princeton's revitalization.

The Princeton Renaissance Project was key, uniting a coalition of people working together with a common vision, according to McKinney. "That was how the major transformative projects became possible," she says.

Stephanie Tyree, executive director of the Hub, says ramping up community involvement right from the beginning is vital.

"Programs that expect and require huge community engagement on the front end can be very successful," she says. "Something really interesting happens when you work with a community and say, 'what we expect in this project is that you will have a huge number of people come in and we're going to get you the resources to do a lot of projects.' The idea is to throw a bunch of projects at the wall and see what sticks."

One project that stuck in Princeton was a collection of murals on downtown buildings. "The murals were a big turning point," says McKinney. "It's impossible to ignore eight giant murals. It was a sweeping aesthetic shift that caused everyone to talk about downtown." Now downtown features a number of public arts projects, including sculptures and an artists' alley. Events like the Mercer Monster Mash and a New Year's Eve Downtown Countdown bring families downtown regularly. "Before this, the idea that people would bring their kids downtown to trick or treat was just off the wall," says McKinney. "That was a paradigm shifting."

The first step is getting the commu-

nity on the same page, says Stushek. "One of the first things is to really focus the community on coming together and defining that vision together," she says. "That way they can see that the community rising up and succeeding is more important than some of the squabbles they might have."

When the Hub begins work with communities, "turf suppression" is a big part of the job, says Tyree.

"In those communities, no matter how big or small, there are consistently fiefdoms," she says. "Maybe it's just human nature. There are various groups all focused on wanting to make their community better, but they don't want to work together. We start working through those conflicts and that basic failure to collaborate."

Barton sees the same issues in Kentucky. "Everyone comes to the table for a different reason," he says. "What we find is there are similar priorities that we

have to acknowledge the parties value. We have to find similar or overlapping values and amplify the energy around those."

One key to the Hub's strategy is what Tyree calls "accompaniment." These communities may have seen a lot of people come in with programs to attempt revitalization, according to Tyree, but they haven't experienced an extended commitment to the community.

"When we work with a group of community volunteers, we commit to working with them as long as they need," she says. "It's not a programmatic commitment. If members of the community don't end up as part of a

*Continued on next page*



The downtown center of Roanoke, Va., above, is home to a number of museums, including institutions dedicated to art, science, astronomy, African-American history and the history of Western Virginia. Photo courtesy of Creative Dog Media - Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge. At right, Roanoke-based Deschutes Brewery hosts an annual Street Pub event at Elmwood Park downtown where visitors can try brews while raising funds for area nonprofits. Photo courtesy of Deschutes Brewery



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## Remaking Downtowns

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network they can draw on for support or resources, they often end up right back where they started."

Bringing people together is key to the ongoing efforts in McMinnville, Tenn., according to Michael Griffith, executive vice president of Security Federal Savings Bank. The small community between Nashville and Chattanooga has been working to capitalize on its location by encouraging start-up businesses downtown.

"I can't stress enough that in a culture that relies on private capital, you need everyone working together: the tourism board, banks, city and county governments, utilities," Griffith says.

A downtown farmers' market provided the catalyst in McMinnville, according to Griffith. "That started a hub that allowed people to congregate," he says. "More people started shopping downtown. We realized that, though we were attracting folks from Nashville who wanted second homes and retirees from the Northeast who just love the area, downtown didn't have all the amenities they need."

City politicians, the local chamber of commerce and others worked together to create a tourism development board funded by a hotel/motel tax and supported by the city. They focused on renovating vacant or underutilized buildings. The city started a pilot program to provide a tax break for developers, freezing property taxes at pre-development rates for 20 years.

McMinnville also changed zoning to encourage mixed-use development and attract more downtown residents.

"If we revitalize downtown, it creates more life and people want to live here," says Griffith. "If they want to live here, they'll build houses and increase our tax base."

### Confronting Hurdles

Downtown revitalization in Appalachia has some special challenges, according to Tyree. One very difficult issue is tied to Appalachia's history of absentee ownership — both of land and of buildings.

"Keystone properties on Main Streets in communities across West Virginia have been abandoned," Tyree says. "There's an urgency to that challenge because those properties have

been abandoned and left open to the elements for decades. We're moving into the time period where the opportunity to revitalize those properties is swiftly closing. Some are becoming public health hazards. Some are literally falling down."

Scott, the University of Kentucky professor, agrees. "It's a property ownership issue," she says. "People or companies own these buildings and parcels of land that have no intention of doing anything with them. I don't know why. Maybe they don't want to sell short. They want to hold onto it for the next boom when they can make their fortune. That's an obstacle to development."

Condemning the buildings and tearing them down is one solution, but city governments hesitate to go that route, for good reason, according to Tyree. "Tearing them down is a solution that creates holes — physical holes in the downtown area," she says. "It also creates fear in the community — fear that there's not a strategy or the resources to put in new buildings, fear that if you start down that pathway, it leads to the community going away. It severs the emotional connections that people have to a place and their commitment to the community."

The Hub's Stushek says one key to dealing with this issue is developing an inventory of vacant buildings and figuring out who owns what, what buildings are for sale, what condition they're in and who has a relationship with the owners. "Every time somebody asks about a particular property, someone should be writing a letter to the landowner detailing the interest in the property so they know they could be doing something with it," she says. "The city can promote buildings for sale

on the city website or Facebook page. Do the promotion the landowners can't afford to do."

"As with much of central Appalachia, we have communities where there's a memory of a more vibrant era," says Tyree. "There's been a hollowing out of Main Street, just because people have left and businesses have shut down. The big question is how do you do community revitalization in a community that was built up for two or three times the number of people it currently has?"

Figuring that out can be a significant challenge and takes a lot of community conversation about infrastructure, along with vision and political leadership, according to Tyree.

The widespread poverty across Appalachia also creates a difficult challenge. "We need people who have the personal resources to volunteer their time to improve their communities," says Tyree. "Poverty, along with the opioid addiction crisis, just decimates capacity in individual communities."

Community revitalization experts agree that there is no one solution, no silver bullet to guarantee the resuscitation of a downtown. But the attempt is important, for the health of communities and people.

"Downtowns are a place to get out of the isolation that we as individuals sometimes feel," says Scott. "By and large, I get more meaning and happiness when I'm collaborating and with people I like, love, respect and care about. That's what makes me healthy and happy, and that's what makes communities healthy and happy. Appalachia needs to reinvigorate the notion of the commons, a space that can bring benefit to us all." ♦

# Appalachia's Political Landscape

## Reauthorization of Mine Lands Program Advances

By Elizabeth E. Payne

On July 19, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a \$35.3 billion appropriations bill that would fund the federal Department of the Interior, the U.S. Forest Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. The bill passed by a vote of 217 to 199, along party lines.

At press time in early August, the bill still needed to be passed by the Senate before becoming law.

Democrats opposed the bill, citing provisions that would weaken environmental protections and limit due process cited concerns for regulations that would limit environmental protections in their opposition, according to the National Association of Counties, an organization that represents the nation's county gov-

ernments. These environmental riders include: preventing U.S. Fish and Wildlife from listing the sage grouse as an endangered species, removing endangered species protections for the gray wolf by 2019 and prohibiting judicial review of that decision, and forbidding the EPA from requiring waste management systems at large industrial livestock operations, among many other provisions.

Included in the appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior, however, were two amendments that would renew funding for a pilot program that restores abandoned coal mine sites with economic development potential. The first amendment expands the eligible states from three to six (Virginia, Alabama and Ohio were added to West Virginia,

Kentucky and Pennsylvania); and the second amendment provided for \$115 million in annual funding instead of the \$90 million initially proposed.

Congress passed a similar funding package in last year's budget and the grants have been used to reclaim former coal mines in order to restore vibrant local economies.

"This program has funded some great projects that have already broken ground in coal communities throughout Appalachia," said Thom Kay, the senior legislative representative for Appalachian Voices, the publisher of this paper. "Representatives Johnson and Griffith have ensured the benefits of the program reach even more communities, and we're grateful for their efforts."

## Endangered Species Act Threatened

In July, the Trump Administration issued new guidelines making it more difficult to grant protections under the Endangered Species Act. At the same time, Congress unveiled a package of nine bills to "modernize" the 45-year-old law that currently protects more than 1,600 species and has saved an estimated 227 species from extinction, according to the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity.

Together, these changes would end the extension of endangered species' protections for species listed as "threatened" and instead decide on a case-by-case basis; cause officials to take economic factors into account when deciding whether to list a species instead of purely scientific factors; allows the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to ignore scientific data when deciding whether to designate an area as critical habitat; and generally make it easier to advance projects like oil drilling, logging and fracked gas pipelines through protected habitat, to name a few.

Kierán Suckling, executive director of the Center for Biological Diversity, told Democracy Now! that the proposal is "the most comprehensive, devastating attempt to destroy this law we've seen in this entire time." — By Kevin Ridder

## House Version of Farm Bill Guts Environmental Protections

By Kevin Ridder

In June, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed their version of the 2018 Omnibus Farm Bill that would roll back protections for endangered species, water and public lands. The Senate did not include any of these provisions in their version of the bill. The Farm Bill is renewed roughly every five years, and governs federal food and agriculture policy.

Under the House's version, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would no longer

be required to examine the impact a pesticide would have on species protected under the Endangered Species Act, according to the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity. Additionally, Clean Water Act permits would no longer be required for releasing pesticides into waterways. The center states that the pesticide industry has spent more than \$43 million on lobbying this congressional session.

"If [this farm bill] becomes law, this bill will be remembered for generations as the hammer that drove the final nail

into the coffin of some of America's most vulnerable species," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity in a press release.

The House bill would also allow several new broad exclusions from the National Environmental Policy Act, which would exempt certain logging projects up to 6,000 acres from public input and environmental review. In granting these exclusions, the U.S. Forest Service would no longer need to consider the cumulative impact of several timber projects on

a landscape. The agency also would not need to consider whether timber projects are within a potential wilderness area or if the projects would affect endangered or threatened species.

Additionally, the House bill would end or cut food stamp benefits for 2 million people by imposing a work requirement for benefit recipients, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. This provision, which is not included in the Senate's bill, is expected to be the most hotly contested item as the House and Senate work to reconcile their versions before the current version expires on Sept. 30.

**115<sup>TH</sup> 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				
	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	Fleischman (R) TN-03	S. Desjardais (R) TN-04	V. Foxx (R) NC-05	P. McHenry (R) NC-10	M. Meadows (R) NC-11	T. Garrett (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
<b>HOUSE</b>																
H.Amdt. 908 to H.R. 6147, the Interior & Environment Appropriations Act, would prevent the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency from using funds to enforce the 2016 methane emissions limits on new and modified oil and gas industry emissions sources. <b>AYES 215 NOES 194 NV 19 ... PASSED</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
H.Amdt. 932 to H.R. 6147, the Interior & Environment Appropriations Act, would block the EPA from using Environmental Justice Small Grants intended to help marginalized communities affected by environmental pollution. <b>AYES 174 NOES 240 NV 14 ... FAILED</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
H.R. 3, the Spending Cuts to Expired and Unnecessary Programs Act, cuts funding from a variety of programs, including \$13 million from the Rural Utilities Service's High Energy Cost Grants, \$16 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and \$50 million from Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations. <b>AYES 210 NOES 206 NV 11 ... PASSED</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
<b>SENATE</b>	M. McConnell (R)	R. Paul (R)		L. Alexander (R)	B. Corker (R)			R. Burr (R)	T. Tillis (R)		T. Kaine (D)	M. Warner (D)	J. Manchin (D)	S. M. Capito (R)		
Senate on H.R. 3, the Spending Cuts to Expired and Unnecessary Programs Act, (see H.R. 3 description above). <b>YEAS 48 NAYS 50 NV 2 ... FAILED</b>	●	●		●	●			●	●		●	●	●	●		●



## Black Lung Disease Surges as Support for Miners Dwindles

By Elizabeth E. Payne

The incidence of black lung disease among Appalachian coal miners is at a 25-year high, according to a recent study by scientists from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Black lung disease results in the scarring of lung tissue when coal and silica dust are inhaled during mining. The disease is chronic and fatal, though there are treatments that can improve quality of life.

Despite the sharp rise in reported cases of black lung, the federal taxes on coal companies that help compensate af-

ected miners are set to expire next year. Currently, coal companies pay \$1.10 per ton of coal excavated underground to the federal Black Lung Disability Trust Fund, which supports miners affected by the incurable disease. But this rate is set to drop by more than half, to \$.50 per ton, in 2019.

Such a reduction in funds would likely require a taxpayer bailout to keep the black lung trust fund solvent, according to an analysis by the Government Accountability Office.

Citing hard times, coal companies are in favor of this tax reduction, but the coal miners' trade union sees things

differently.

"This is a problem that has been created by the coal industry," Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mineworkers Union of America, told Reuters. "There is a system to help the victims of this disease already in place that the coal industry pays for, and I see no reason why we would put the taxpayers on the hook instead."

In Kentucky, new state regulations make it harder for miners with black lung disease to win workers' compensation claims. The law prohibits radiologists from reading a patient's x-ray and diagnosing the disease. Only pulmon-

ologists — specialists of the lungs and respiratory system — can now make this diagnosis for compensation claims.

According to an analysis by NPR, "just six pulmonologists in Kentucky have the federal certification to read black lung X-rays and four of them routinely are hired by coal companies or their insurers."

Meanwhile, in July the Western Kentucky District U.S. Attorney charged eight former employees of the now-bankrupt Armstrong Energy with falsifying dust monitoring samples in two Kentucky mines.

## Blair Mountain Returns to National Register of Historic Places

By Hannah Gillespie

On June 29, the site of the Blair Mountain labor conflict in southern West Virginia was placed back on the National Register of Historic Places after years of legal action led by environmental and historic preservation advocates.

The 1,600-acre battlefield was originally listed on the register in 2009, but was delisted nine months later due to successful lobbying efforts from Alpha Natural Resources and Arch Coal. In 2016, a federal judge declared the removal to be unlawful.

Combined, the two coal companies

hold three mountaintop removal coal mining permits that overlap the battlefield. "The listing decision imposes significant restrictions on the ability of permittees to mine within the listed area, and may prevent any mining altogether," states Sierra Club Senior Attorney Peter Morgan.

"This victory is the culmination of a 12-year saga that took many legal twists and turns along the way in our efforts to save this part of West Virginia's history," Regina Hendrix, volunteer at the West Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club, said in a statement. "Sustaining legal and activist action over such a long

period requires unconditional commitment from fellow West Virginians, in particular Kenny King and Wilma and Terry Steele along with other coalition members."

In 1921, more than 10,000 coal miners marched for the right to unionize the southern coalfields. On August 31, 1921, they were met by 2,000 armed deputies and mine guards at Blair Mountain. The battle lasted for five days and ended with the arrival of the U.S. Army and Air Corps. Dozens of people were killed. This remains the largest organized armed uprising in the United States since the Civil War.

## North Carolina Slashes Duke Energy Carolinas Rate Hike

By Kevin Ridder

On June 22, the North Carolina Utilities Commission denied Duke Energy Carolinas' request to enact a 13.6 percent overall rate hike and rejected Duke's proposal to raise rates to pay for \$7.8 billion in grid modernization projects over 10 years.

The commission instead approved a rate increase of 0.3 percent for residential customers effective Aug. 1, according to the Charlotte Business Journal. After four years, residential rates will increase by 1.2 percent.

Residential customers' grid access fee was raised from \$11.80 to \$14 per

month. While lower than Duke's requested amount of \$17.79 per month, the change stands to disproportionately impact residents who use little electricity but have to pay the increased flat fee. This could dissuade residents from adopting energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades. The commission also fined Duke \$70 million for the utility's coal ash mismanagement.

Part of the rate increase would cover approximately \$545 million Duke has already spent on coal ash cleanup. In July, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein filed a formal notice of appeal with the commission against this increase on the grounds that it punishes

ratepayers for Duke's mismanagement of the toxic material.

The Sierra Club also filed a formal notice of appeal. In a statement, the nonprofit organization called the \$70 million penalty "a slap on the wrist" given the commissioners' decision to allow Duke to charge customers \$545 million for coal ash cleanup. In the statement, David Rogers with the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign wrote, "We strongly oppose the decision to force families, businesses and people struggling on fixed and lower incomes to foot the bill for Duke's nearly 30 years of negligence and mismanagement."

## EPA Rolls Back Coal Ash Protections

By Elizabeth E. Payne

On July 17, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released a new rule establishing national standards for handling the storage and disposal of coal ash, the toxic byproduct of burning coal to make electricity.

This effort, which replaces stricter rules established by the Obama administration in 2015, delays the dates by which existing coal ash dumps must be closed, lifts requirements for monitoring surrounding groundwater for contamination, and allows states to assume responsibility for regulating coal ash within their borders.

According to the Energy News Network, Georgia is hoping to follow Oklahoma by gaining federal approval to regulate its own coal ash.

"The entire reason we have a

national coal ash rule is that the state agencies failed to protect us from disasters like TVA's Kingston spill and Duke Energy's Dan River disaster," said Frank Holleman, senior attorney with nonprofit law firm Southern Environmental Law Center, in a press release.

The 2008 and 2014 disasters he mentioned dumped 1.1 billion and 27 million gallons, respectively, of coal ash sludge into surrounding waterways. The EPA's 2015 regulations were put in place in response to these significant spills.

The new standards were signed by Andrew Wheeler, the acting administrator for the EPA and a former lobbyist for the coal-mining company Murray Energy.

"These amendments provide states and utilities much-needed flexibility

in the management of coal ash, while ensuring human health and the environment are protected," Wheeler said in a statement.

The original standards put in place included closure of existing ponds in favor of safer storage options and monitoring surrounding water for contamination and were intended to protect nearby residents from toxic heavy metals found in coal ash. The new regulations lift the requirements meant to both prevent and detect leakage and contamination.

Acting EPA Administrator Wheeler applauded the changes, saying "our actions mark a significant departure from the one-size-fits-all policies of the past and save [utilities] tens of millions of dollars in regulatory costs."

## Rural Residents Face Greater Energy Costs than National Average

By Rory McIlmoil

Rural households spend about 40 percent more of their income on energy costs than households in metropolitan areas, according to a comprehensive new report.

On July 18, the nonprofit organizations American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and Energy Efficiency for All released a report that analyzes the energy cost burden — or the portion of gross household income spent on home energy costs (not including transportation) — for rural households across the nine major census regions of the United States.

The report found that low-income households in rural areas spend a percentage of their income on home energy costs that is almost three times greater than higher-income households across the country. Among households of all income levels, the median energy cost burden for rural households across the United States is 4.4 percent, compared to 3.3 percent nationally.

Demographic information compiled in the report shows that renters, elderly residents, non-white residents and those living in multi-family or

manufactured homes are hit particularly hard.

The report shows that the problem is particularly pronounced in the East and Southeast regions of the nation. Appalachian Voices, the publisher of this newspaper, works to advance energy efficiency in the region and has identified families who spend as much as 50 percent of their income on energy costs in the winter.

"It's expensive to be poor," Appalachian Voices' Executive Director Tom Cormons told U.S. News and World Report. "A lot of times, folks without resources may end up facing higher monthly costs because they don't have the resources to make the investment that's going to save them money in the long term, such as upgrades to the house."

In the report, the authors advocate for policies and initiatives that could help alleviate high energy costs. "Energy efficiency upgrades can lessen these energy burdens by as much as 25 percent, resulting in more than \$400 in annual energy bill savings for some households," a press release announcing the report states.

## The Cost of Trump's Coal & Nuclear Bailout

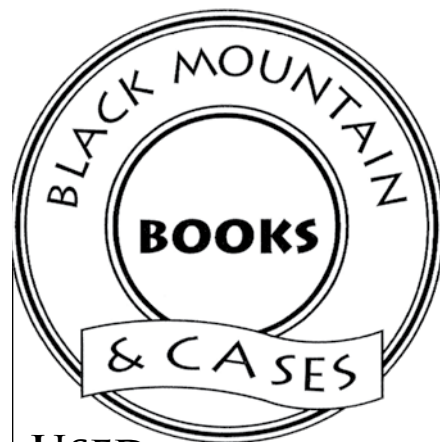
In July, a study found that the Trump Administration's draft proposal to subsidize floundering coal and nuclear plants for two years could cost between \$9.7 billion and \$17.2 billion per year. The study was commissioned by a group of six national energy associations representing oil, wind energy, natural gas, alternative fuels and other interests. The administration's draft plan would stop coal and nuclear plants from closing by forcing grid operators to purchase coal and nuclear power, citing national security concerns. A similar plan was unanimously rejected by federal regulators in January. — *By Kevin Ridder*

## N.C. Solar Developers Lose Challenge to Duke

In June, the N.C. Utilities Commission denied the requests of two clean energy business associations to review conditions for battery storage Duke Energy inserted into power-purchase agreements for 680 megawatts of new solar projects, according to the Charlotte Business Journal. The groups are concerned this would allow Duke to extend its monopoly by punishing independent developers that offer bids tying battery storage into solar projects. — *By Kevin Ridder*

## TVA Eliminating Energy Efficiency Rebates

The Tennessee Valley Authority is discontinuing nearly all of the utility bill rebates offered under its eScore energy efficiency program by Sept. 15, according to the Knoxville News Sentinel. Funds for eScore, which offered rebates to customers who installed energy efficiency upgrades, will be redirected to programs assisting low-income families in Nashville and Memphis. Southern Alliance for Clean Energy Director Stephen Smith told the News Sentinel he feels TVA is "abandoning their commitment to energy efficiency. They're putting a few million in high visibility weatherization approaches [in Nashville] and in Memphis, [but] the need is so great that barely scratches the surface." — *By Kevin Ridder*



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# Inside Appalachian Voices

## New Study Maps Increase in Land Disturbed by Coal Mining

In a peer-reviewed study published on July 25 in PLOS ONE, researchers from SkyTruth, Duke University, and Appalachian Voices released the first-ever maps of the year-by-year footprint of surface coal mining in Central Appalachia. The study, coupled with an earlier dataset, revealed that surface mining, including mountaintop mining, has been responsible for clearing 5,900 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 1.5 million acres) of land between 1976 and 2015 — equivalent to one out of every 14



acres in Central Appalachia. This total area is roughly three times that of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In addition, the study found

a drastic increase in the ratio of land cleared to tonnage of coal produced over the last three decades. In the 1980s, approximately 10 square meters of land were disturbed per metric ton (2,200 pounds) of coal produced. By 2015, approximately 30 square meters were disturbed to produce the same amount of coal — a threefold increase. The study noted that these findings are consistent with the depletion of coal reserves in Central Appalachia.

“The thickest, easiest-to-access coal seams in Central Appalachia have largely been mined out,” noted Matt

Wasson, Appalachian Voices director of programs, “so every new mine is mining thinner seams and having to blow up more mountain to get to them.”

The research team utilized the cloud-based Google Earth Engine to analyze and process more than 10,000 individual satellite images. Their model identified areas that lacked forest cover in contrast to surrounding forested areas on a yearly basis. After excluding known roads, bodies of water and cities, the team labeled any remaining deforested areas as likely surface mines, validated by manually spot-checking the results against aerial survey photography and other imagery. The semi-automated nature of the analysis allows the dataset to be updated annually. Visit [appvoices.org/new-map](http://appvoices.org/new-map) to learn more and view an interactive map.

## Powell Valley Electric Co-op Members Raise Their Voices

Over the last year, our Tennessee Energy Savings team has been meeting with member-owners of electric cooperatives in East Tennessee to share information and empower them to engage in the decision making of their electric co-ops.

Appalachian Voices has provided workshops on member rights and responsibilities, the basics of how co-ops operate and special programs they can offer, and trainings on how to facilitate meetings and use

digital tools. We’ve also helped members research different topics of interest around co-op issues.

Recently, a group of members called “Powell Valley Electric Cooperative Member Voices” launched a campaign to make their cooperative more transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of its communities. The group has three candidates running for board seats and submitted a bylaw amendment to open the cooperative’s

monthly board meetings to all members.

Our team is proud to offer our support to these members when needed. Check out their website, [pvemembervoices.wordpress.com](http://pvemembervoices.wordpress.com) and contact them at (423)724-8258.

If you are a member of Powell Valley Electric Cooperative, support the work of PVEC Member Voices by voting at the annual meeting on September 15 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Hancock County High School in Sneedville, Tenn.

## Tell Virginia’s Governor to Plan for Clean Energy

Right now the Northam administration is developing its Virginia Energy Plan, a roadmap for the commonwealth’s energy policy over the next decade. Clean energy advocates across the state want to ensure that Virginia’s economy is built on energy efficiency, solar power and smart storage solutions instead of more fracked gas pipelines.

The administration is specifically seeking input on policies affecting solar power, offshore wind power, energy storage, electric vehicles and energy efficiency, but are welcoming comments on all energy issues.

Tell Gov. Northam that we should work to replace an outdated, fossil-fuel based economy with a sustainable, clean energy economy. Four public hearings were held in July, but you can submit comments until Aug. 24. For details and to add your voice, visit [appvoices.org/2018-energy-plan](http://appvoices.org/2018-energy-plan)

## Empowering Citizens at the 2018 Water Justice Summit

Water defenders and community activists from across Central Appalachia and beyond gathered in Blacksburg, Va., earlier this summer to network, share stories and strategize to protect the region’s water. The day included workshops on topics such as water quality monitoring, organizing basics, media outreach and facilitation training. Community members whose water is imperiled by industrial threats shared their experiences and discussed efforts to repair their

rural municipal water systems, clean up coal slurry, defend against fracked gas pipelines and fight for indigenous sovereignty. The event included special opening and closing ceremonies honoring water. The day before the summit, attendees participated in a collaborative art exhibit, “What Color is Water,” and a discussion panel, “Mothers for Water Justice.”

The 2018 Water Justice Summit was supported by Appalachian Voices, The

Alliance for Appalachia, POWHR Coalition, Young Appalachian Patriots, The Stay Together Appalachian Youth Project and our Virginia Tech partners: The Institute for Peace Studies, The Appalachian Studies Department, The Gloria D. Smith Professorship in Africana Studies, The Perspective Gallery, and The Institute for Policy and Governance.

To learn more visit [appvoices.org/empowering-citizens](http://appvoices.org/empowering-citizens)

**Defend Clean and Affordable Energy for All**

**ENERGY SAVINGS APPALACHIA**  
A PROGRAM OF APPALACHIAN VOICES

Across Appalachia, electric utilities like Duke, Dominion, TVA and even our electric cooperatives are attempting to protect their outdated business model and lock us into a dirty energy future. They are standing in the way of a sustainable planet, and harming vulnerable families and communities.

To counter this threat, we need to join together to defend clean and affordable energy options. Follow the work we’re doing in your community and join with your neighbors to create an energy future that benefits everyone.

**JOIN THE FIGHT: [AppVoices.org/signup](http://AppVoices.org/signup)**

**Do you support The Appalachian Voice?**

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Visit [appvoices.org/raise-our-voice](http://appvoices.org/raise-our-voice) or call our Boone office at (828) 262-1500.



# Inside Appalachian Voices

## Member Tribute

## Clint Dye Honoring an advocate for justice and human rights

Adapted from the obituary by Nancy Dye

On June 28, Russell County, Va., lost a dedicated human rights proponent: Clinton Dale Dye of the Kent’s Ridge section of Swords Creek, Va.

Born June 27, 1949, in Mill Creek, Va., Clint was a son of the late Clarence William Dye and Hazel Miller Dye Perkins. He was a 1967 graduate of Honaker High School and went on to further his education at East Tennessee State University, where he graduated in 1971 with a bachelor’s degree.

Clint entered the United States Army as an ROTC 1st lieutenant, a trained paratrooper with the 81st battalion in Germany. He and Nancy did a tour of duty in the Europe Division of the U.S. Army, stationed in Frankfurt, Germany during the Vietnam era, where he proudly served as a race relations facilitator. He left the military as captain in December 1975.

Upon his return to Southwest Virginia, he worked as a mental



health counselor and as a juvenile counselor at the Blackford Correctional Center. He then worked in the quality control department of E. Dillon and Company and helped with the Allan Block Development. He also worked as a salesperson for the Clinch Valley Limestone Quarry.

Clint served the Raven, Cedar Bluff and Swords Creek communities as a postal mail carrier from 1989 through 2014 and made many lasting friendships during that time. He was also employed by the U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission from 1988 to 2004.

Following his retirement, he became a beekeeper and farmer. Beginning in fall 2016, he volunteered as a distributor of *The Appalachian Voice*, this newspaper, in Russell and Tazewell counties. Clint was also a

volunteer promoter for Kevin Locke of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, promoting diversity and multiculturalism.

Clint was a member of the Baha’i faith for 36 years and was a human rights advocate. He strived to bring awareness to social injustice, and being a global citizen was his passion. Clint lived by the motto, “one human family, one land, one God, one people.” He served as an administrative assistant for the Baha’i faith for several years.

In 1994, Clint survived a very serious farm tractor accident and God blessed his family to be able to share 24 additional years of his love and devotion.

“Clint was happiest when he was able to help someone, make their day a little better,” says his friend Kathy Rowles. “He shared his positive spirit with everyone from every walk of life. I will miss his inspiration.”

He was a wonderful husband of 49 years to Nancy Herndon Dye as well as a father, grandfather, brother and friend and shared a very special bond with his eight grandchildren.

*The Appalachian Voice sends deepest condolences to his family, and expresses our sincere gratitude and appreciation for his volunteer service.*

## Help Community Threatened by Compressor Station

Dominion Energy wants to build a massive compressor station for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline in the historic African-American community of Union Hill in Buckingham County, Va. The giant engine would run 24/7, creating toxic air emissions and near-constant noise that could harm the health and well-being of nearby communities. Dominion needs an air pollution permit from the Department of Environmental Quality. DEQ will hold a public comment period Aug. 8 to Sept. 11 and will accept comments regarding the draft air permit and proposed compressor station. DEQ will also hold an information session Aug. 16 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Buckingham Co. Administration Building and a public hearing on Sept. 11 from 5:00 to 9:30 p.m. at the Buckingham County Middle School. Send in your comments

and show up at the hearing to support the Union Hill and Buckingham communities! Visit [tinyurl.com/BuckinghamHearing](http://tinyurl.com/BuckinghamHearing).

## A Fond Farewell

Appalachian Voices would like to bid a very fond farewell to our two Energy Savings AmeriCorps Project Conserve outreach associates, Katie Kienbaum and Becca Bauer, who both worked to bring energy efficiency to Western North Carolina. Katie worked with us for two service years, and leaves us for a full time position with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in Minneapolis, Minn. Becca, who served with us for the 2017-18 service term, heads out on several travel adventures including hiking the 500-mile Colorado Trail.

We also say a tearful goodbye to Lydia Graves, our New Economy field coordinator based in Norton, Va. Lydia joined as an AmeriCorps VISTA in 2017, and worked to build a new, sustainable economy for the Southwest Virginia coal

region. She heads out on an exciting adventure to serve as an au pair for a year in a small town on the French coast.

We thank these three fantastic individuals for their devoted and passionate work, and wish them all the best in the future.

**Appalachian Voices**

**NOW HIRING**

Appalachian Voices is hiring a full-time, management-level position for our New Economy Program based in our Norton, Va., office. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. Full job posting is available online. EOE.

**AppVoices.org/employment**

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.

## Organizational Staff

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Deputy Executive Director ..... Kate Boyle

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Controller ..... Maya Vikrius  
Operations Manager ..... Shay Boyd  
Director of Strategic Advancement ..... Brian Sewell  
Development Coordinator ..... Leigh Kirchner  
Operations and Outreach Associate ..... Meredith Shelton

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Senior Legislative Representative ..... Thom Kay  
Central Appalachian Program Manager ..... Erin Savage  
Central Appalachian Field Coordinator ..... Willie Dodson  
Central Appalachian Environmental Scientist ..... Matt Hepler  
North Carolina Program Manager ..... Amy Adams  
North Carolina Field Coordinator ..... Ridge Graham  
Virginia Program Manager ..... Peter Anderson  
Virginia Field Organizer ..... Lara Mack  
Energy Savings Program Manager ..... Rory McIlmoil  
N.C. Energy Savings Outreach Coordinator ..... Lauren Essick  
Tenn. Energy Savings Outreach Coordinator ..... Brianna Krisley  
Tenn. Outreach OSMRE/VISTA ..... Nina Levison  
New Economy Program Manager ..... Adam Wells  
New Economy Field Coordinator ..... Lydia Graves  
Southwest Virginia Solar VISTA ..... Austin Counts

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## The Appalachian Voice

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Nothing begs more for a hike in the mountains than the dog days of summer. Photographer Shawn Mitchell took this photo of his Siberian husky Sora on a hike up Sitting Bear Mountain in Pisgah National Forest. Photographers of all levels are invited to enter their best shots of Appalachia into the 16th Annual Appalachian Mountain Photo Competition. Submissions will be accepted starting in mid-August, with a deadline of November 16 at 5 p.m. To enter visit [appmtnphotocomp.org](http://appmtnphotocomp.org).

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