

STEADFAST ADVOCATES FOR APPALACHIA



AppalachianVoices

DEEP ROOTS HOLD STEADY IN A SHIFTING LANDSCAPE

2025 marks one of the most challenging years ever for Appalachian Voices' work. The bedrock environmental protections that we invoke to defend our mountains, rivers, forests and communities are under attack like never before, and the federal government is pulling back support for clean energy and sustainable economies in the places where these are most needed.

Despite these incredible headwinds, we've stood our ground, defending our region as the strongest, most agile organization we've ever been. This would not be possible without the members, volunteers, partners and financial contributors who stand with us and provide the backing we need to fight against those who put profit over people and our natural heritage.

Standing strong together

In this overview, you'll read about a class action lawsuit filed in federal court in Washington, D.C. — Appalachian Voices vs. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This suit is aimed at reinstating hundreds of federal grants stripped away from community-driven projects across the United States. The communities impacted by this decision disproportionately experience pollution and environmental

degradation, and have been historically underrepresented and under-resourced.

You'll also learn about our work on the ground in West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina. In those states, we are defending wild places against illegal destruction by coal companies and fighting alongside residents to protect their land and communities from fracked gas pipelines. We're also working with local leaders to bring scores of community solar projects to life and build community resilience hubs, powered by solar and battery storage, to help residents prepare in the face of an increasing number of climate disasters.

We're incredibly grateful for your continued support, which makes all of this work possible. Thank you for standing with Appalachia, and for caring about these mountains we call home.



Tom

Tom Cormons
Executive Director



APPALACHIAN VOICES V. EPA

“America’s support for homegrown, local solutions to serious problems is crucially important. That’s why Congress included the Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grant Program in the Inflation Reduction Act. We are happy to go to bat, not just for our own grant and the communities it serves, but for this program as a whole that supports similar work in rural communities, cities and suburbs from coast to coast.”

— Tom Cormons
Executive Director

In June, we joined 22 other organizations in filing *Appalachian Voices v. EPA*, a class-action lawsuit against the federal government for unlawfully terminating the Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental and Climate Justice Block Grant programs despite a congressional directive to fund them.

The terminated grants supported community-based projects across the United States, including initiatives to better prepare for natural disasters, replace lead pipes in public water systems, plant trees in urban heat zones, combat high energy costs, and mitigate stormwater and flood damage. The grant terminations have impacted more than 350 nonprofits, tribes and local governments.

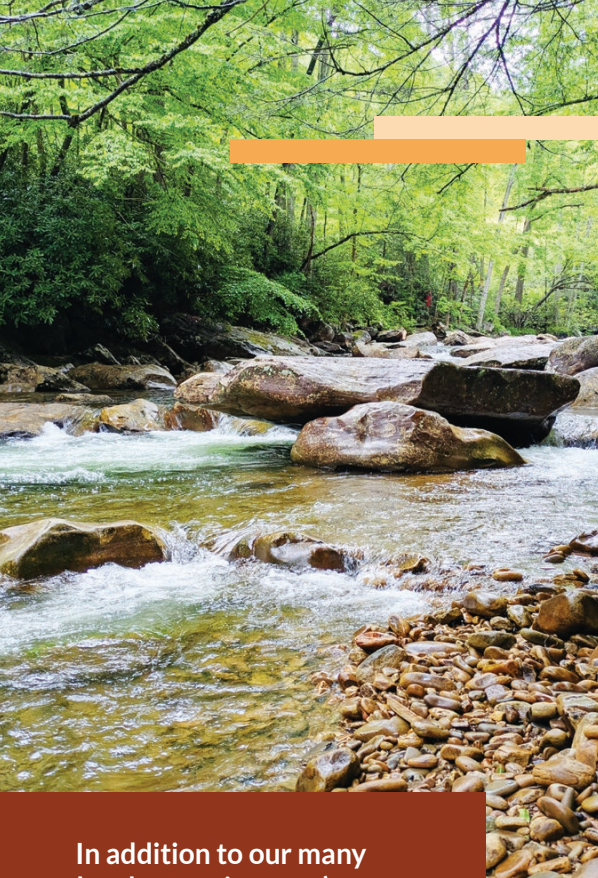
We’re represented in this case by the Southern Environmental Law Center in partnership with other leading legal advocates. The case seeks to restore the \$3 billion grant program nationwide.

In 2023, Appalachian Voices received a grant from this EPA program for our



Community Strong initiative to help five former coal communities in rural Southwest Virginia develop local project plans for sustainable infrastructure. Nearly 300 local residents met over the course of 15 community meetings to plan projects that would support environmental and community health and well-being, extreme weather preparedness, and stronger local economies. We’re doing our best to continue this work, but the EPA’s termination of our grant was a big setback.





FIGHTING FOR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERWAYS

In West Virginia, 3,600 acres of surface coal mines surround the headwaters of the South Fork of the Cherry River, a tributary of the Gauley River watershed. These mines pollute waterways with sediment and metals and have landed the Gauley River on a list of the most endangered rivers in the country. The mines are also the cause of illegal coal hauling through a national forest.

“The sparkling, clear waterways of the West Virginia highlands nourish and sustain an incredible array of life, including the endangered candy darter, native brook trout and the Eastern hellbender,” says Willie Dodson, Appalachian Voices’ Coal Impacts Program Manager. “These streams form in the Monongahela National Forest and converge to flow through the Gauley River

National Recreation Area — public lands that generate millions of dollars in tourism revenue each year.”

This year, we launched a campaign with our partners called “Don’t Mine the Mon” to shine a light on environmental harms and abuses on public lands. Thanks to our collective advocacy, illegal coal-hauling in the Monongahela National Forest has been halted, effectively shuttering the massive Rocky Run Surface Mine.

In addition to our many local campaigns, we’re monitoring and pushing back against the Trump administration’s attempts to weaken or gut critical environmental and health protections, like the coal ash cleanup rule finalized in 2024.

Zombie Mines and Giant Salamanders

Idled mines contaminate our land and water. In Southwest Virginia, we joined Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards and the Sierra Club in court to force cleanup at several long-idled mines. These mines pollute waterways that are home to the Eastern hellbender, a giant salamander that’s under consideration for endangered species status (pictured at right). The mines lie within the proclamation boundary of Jefferson National Forest and are a perennial eyesore from High Knob’s natural wonders. Successful mine reclamation will reduce pollution, restore native forests and reconnect important wildlife habitats.



FIGHTING FOR MINERS' RIGHTS

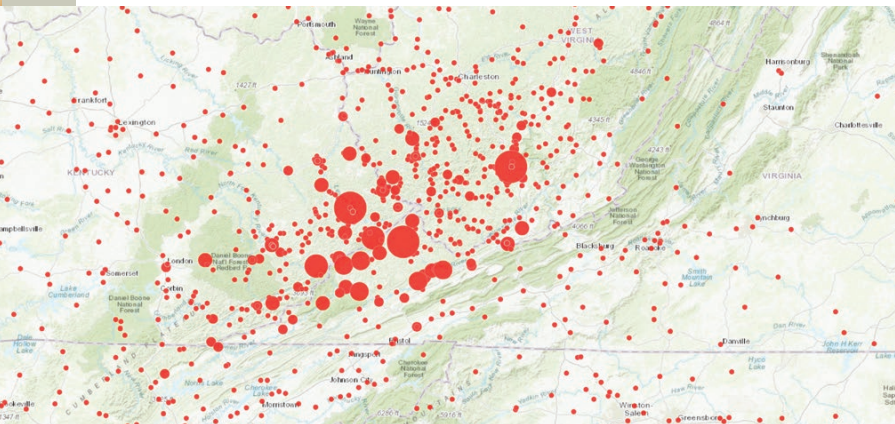
New cases of black lung disease have been on the rise for two decades, affecting thousands of coal mining families across the country. The disease is incurable and gets worse over time. One reason it's been increasing — particularly in Appalachia, where 20% of veteran miners have some form of black lung — is due to high levels of silica dust within the remaining coal seams, which is even more toxic than coal dust.

This year, Appalachian Voices pushed back when the federal government effectively eliminated the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health program that develops protective equipment for miners and provides free, anonymous screenings for black lung disease, and targeted 33 Mine Safety and Health Administration offices for closure, severely impeding the agency's ability to perform crucial mine safety inspections. Thanks to our efforts, several NIOSH programs and most of the MSHA offices were ultimately spared. We're also working to preserve a life-saving rule meant to protect miners from high exposure to dangerous silica dust.

Congress created the Black Lung Program long ago to provide necessary monetary and medical benefits to coal miners

who suffer from the disease. Applying for these benefits is a cumbersome and time-consuming process, with coal companies typically fighting tooth and nail to deflect responsibility for paying coal miners what they're owed.

Families across the country rely on black lung disability benefits to replace lost wages when they can no longer work. These benefits also ensure they have access to health insurance that pays for the cost of care for their disease. We continue to advocate alongside miners and their families as they successfully ask their local officials and federal legislators to support an increase in benefit levels to keep up with inflation.



Using data from the Department of Labor, we've created a map this year to better visualize the scale of the black lung crisis.

Learn more:





HEALING OUR LAND WITH FORESTS AND CLEAN ENERGY

Our work to protect the environment doesn't stop at the statehouse or courthouse door. The Appalachian Voices team continuously works in communities across the region to restore the land and spark clean energy economies.

This year we launched Mineland ReLeaf, a project aimed at restoring the health of land left scarred by surface coal mining in Appalachia. We plan to restore native forests on formerly mined land in Virginia, with the goal of generating carbon credits for the thousands of tons of carbon the new trees will remove from the atmosphere. The accompanying revenue from those credits will support the long-term monitoring and stewardship of these forests.

If successful, this scalable model will ultimately fund land reforestation practices on some of the more than 600,000

acres of poorly reclaimed and unforested mineland in the region. This multigenerational project aims to heal land over time and restore healthy habitat, while offering the immediate benefit of carbon sequestration through green space.

As we work to heal the land, we're also advocating for clean energy.

In Tennessee, we're continuing our partnerships with utilities to encourage them to generate clean energy through solar power and support projects that benefit communities. At the same time, we're joining organized labor and others to launch a workforce training program to prepare workers for jobs in the trades, including those related to clean energy.

And in Virginia, our collaboration with the Solar Workgroup of Southwest Virginia led to the inaugural Southwest Virginia Solar

continued ►

Summit in May. The half-day event drew more than 200 attendees, including local officials, educators, students and solar professionals, to explore the growing opportunity for solar energy in the region's future.

"It was inspiring to see so many different people and organizations working together to further the Solar Workgroup's mission of developing a locally rooted solar industry," says Andie Waugh, our AmeriCorps national service volunteer who coordinated the event. "Many folks were introduced to the work for the first time, creating opportunities for education and connection."



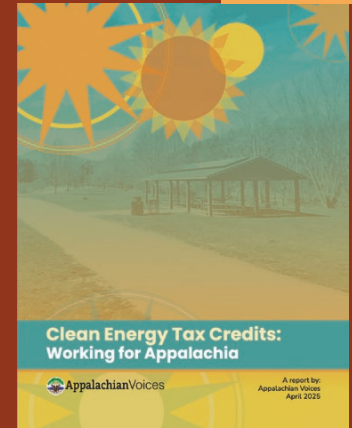
At the inaugural Southwest Virginia Solar Summit, panelists discussed opportunities, challenges and the path forward for the region's growing solar industry.



Appalachian Solar Finance Fund in Action

Appalachian Voices manages the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund, which helps connect community solar projects in Appalachia to funding sources and technical assistance. Over the past four years, the fund has supported 83 solar projects in six Central Appalachian states, bringing 7.9 megawatts of new solar to the grid and avoiding more than 5,400 tons of carbon emissions annually. Many of the projects were boosted by funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, which expanded a suite of tax incentives to support low- and zero-emission energy resources, as well as tax incentives to support domestic manufacturing of energy technologies.

For one project in Abingdon, Virginia, a community of retirees installed solar panels on their cohousing facilities to help reduce the cost of living for lower-income residents. The 89.9-kilowatt project leveraged federal tax incentives to save residents more than \$685,000 in electricity costs over the life of the panels.



Clean Energy Tax Credits: Working for Appalachia is a report we authored to illustrate the benefits that federal tax credits for clean energy and energy efficiency had for nonprofits and businesses in Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Amid contentious budget reconciliation negotiations, we secured bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress for retaining these tax credits — but Congress voted to end the tax credits early. We will use all available tools to keep advancing smart renewable energy and energy efficiency investments in our region.

CALLING FOR CLEAN ENERGY INSTEAD OF NEW FRACKED GAS



Across the country, but especially in the Southeast, energy companies hold a tremendous amount of power. They use this power to advance policies and projects at enormous profit for their shareholders — and that are paid for by everyday customers.

Appalachian Voices works to erode that power and is vigorously opposing the more than 16 gigawatts of fracked gas infrastructure proposed by Duke Energy (NC), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TN) and Dominion Energy (VA).

Drawing from more than a decade of experience fighting fossil fuels, including the historic defeat of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, we work with local communities to intervene at every decision point in the process.

In April, we celebrated a huge victory with community members who would be impacted by the proposed Balico gas-

fired power plant in Southside Virginia. After hours of powerful public testimony, their board of supervisors voted 6-1 to reject Balico's rezoning application for what would have been the state's largest power plant — and which would have served a massive campus of data centers.

In addition to fighting fossil-fuel pipelines and permits in multiple states, we collaborated with the Southern Environmental Law Center to challenge Dominion's proposed plan to meet future energy needs, which relied heavily on fracked gas. Through expert research and hard data, we demonstrated that the energy demand can be met more affordably through clean energy sources — without the need to expand or build new gas pipelines or plants. This research provides a roadmap for a clean energy economy that decision makers can follow going forward.

CLEAN ENERGY FOR THE CLEARFORK

This year, we continued our collaboration with the Woodland Community Land Trust and the Southern Connected Communities Project to plan for the construction of a 1-megawatt solar farm with battery storage on the land trust's property.

The project has the potential to significantly lower the cost of

electricity for land trust residents in the rural Clearfork Valley of Tennessee. It would also generate revenue to support community programs like a small business incubator the trust has been developing.

We also made plans with the land trust for the installation of rooftop solar and storage systems on community buildings slated to become resilience hubs. The plans also include weatherization and electrification upgrades for households facing

disproportionately high energy burdens.

These innovative projects once had the potential to receive funding from federal clean energy and environmental justice programs, but many of those programs have been eliminated by Congress and the Trump administration. Despite that setback, we continue to work side-by-side with our partners to plan for and move these key community projects forward as alternative funding sources become available.

At the same time, we're helping residents develop a household weatherization program to make the most of future state energy efficiency rebates, and we're exploring options for a citizen science flood monitoring and warning system with local universities. Finally, the Clearfork Valley will serve as the first location for our innovative apprenticeship readiness program for rural communities.



Photo: Jeff Crabtree

WHEN THE FLOODWATERS RISE: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

In February, several members of the Appalachian Voices team worked in the town of Pennington Gap, Virginia, to help remove flood debris from Leeman Field, a popular park and community gathering area. They were pulling household objects out of the muck just days after the federal government terminated our grant to help mitigate flooding in that exact area.

“There’s something particularly heartbreaking about pulling a baby’s sock from the muddy banks of the Powell River while the government dismantles funding that helps communities better prepare for floods like this one,” says Kara Dotten,

Appalachian Voices’ New Economy Program Coordinator.

Unfortunately, the February deluge in Southwest Virginia was just one of several floods that battered our region this year, and it served as a devastating reminder of why we’d launched multiple projects in areas hit hard by Hurricane Helene in 2024. These disaster-preparedness projects include planning for the installation of microgrids in areas where power is frequently lost due to remote or rough terrain, and the placement of solar panels paired with battery-based energy storage on rural fire stations.



Learn more:



A note about Hurricane Helene

Last fall, Hurricane Helene ravaged our region. Flooding, landslides and downed trees led to multiple lifeline failures — including loss of electricity, communications and drinking water — and affected many members of the Appalachian Voices family. We are incredibly thankful that all our board members and staff remained safe.

Immediately after the storm, Appalachian Voices began engaging on the ground, providing much-needed supplies and other help, and a Helene Recovery webpage we created became a trusted hub for information. In the following weeks, we secured temporary heat and power sources for homes facing months without these essentials.

Today, we continue our work in areas hit by Helene and beyond to promote long-term recovery and community resilience in the region.

This unexpected and tragic event led to deepened engagement on the local level while also reminding us of the unique niche our organization fills — particularly in difficult times.





SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR APPALACHIA.

HERE'S HOW:

Start or renew your Appalachian Voices membership by giving today. Your support helps us amplify the voices of the people of Appalachia and protect the land, air, water and communities of this beautiful region we call home.

Join our advocacy network and learn about opportunities to have your voice heard. Your voice helps us elevate important issues to decision makers and the public.

Volunteer with us. Your time helps us make more connections in communities across the region, uniting people around shared values to create lasting change.

Thank you for standing with us in 2025.

AppVoices.org/get-involved



For nearly 30 years, Appalachian Voices has worked at the intersection of environmental protection, economic opportunity and social justice. Over those years, we've developed a reservoir of experience, relationships and momentum to dramatically scale our work to protect the land, air and water of Central and Southern Appalachia, and to advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy.

Learn more about our work and our impact at **AppVoices.org**

AppVoices.org/giving



OFFICES:

Boone, North Carolina

164 South Depot St.
Boone, NC 28607
(828) 262-1500

Norton, Virginia

816 Park Ave. NW
Norton, VA 24273
(276) 679-1691

Charlottesville, Virginia

244 East High St.
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 293-6373

Knoxville, Tennessee

815 Gill Ave., Suite 201
Knoxville, TN 37917
(865) 291-0083

Founded in 1997, Appalachian Voices is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that brings people together to protect the land, air, water and communities of Central and Southern Appalachia. In North Carolina, financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the Charitable Solicitation Licensing Section at 888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state. In Virginia, financial statements are available from the State Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23218.



Appalachian Voices is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator. We put every dollar you invest to good use by keeping our administrative and fundraising costs low in order to maximize our impact.

