

STEADFAST ADVOCATES FOR APPALACHIA



AppalachianVoices





SHARED VALUES, TOUGH FIGHTS, AND REAL PROGRESS

It is no secret that we are living through an exceptionally challenging time when it comes to defending our air, water, forests, and mountains while working for healthy communities with sustainable economies. Simply put, we are in the midst of some of the toughest fights we've ever seen as we confront the impact of basic environmental protections being gutted at the federal level and the reversal of federal support for clean energy and green economies.

But I am proud to say that Appalachian Voices' incredibly dedicated and talented team is meeting these challenges on multiple fronts with a winning combination of passion, creativity, thoughtful strategy, and deep collaboration.

The result — as you will see in this report on our work so far in 2026 — is that we are successfully seizing opportunities to continue our progress for clean energy and healthy local economies while steadfastly defending our communities and irreplaceable natural heritage, scoring important victories against those who would put profit first.

Whether winning game-changing clean energy policies in Virginia (p.4), bringing job-creating distributed solar projects to communities across six states (p.5), working with local opponents to defeat polluting methane gas power plants (p.6), winning stronger protections for threatened and endangered species harmed by mountaintop removal mining (p.9), or re-establishing native

hardwood forest on a scarred mine site (p.10), our team is battling headwinds in practical pursuit of our shared vision.

When you remember who you are and what you stand for, and you're ready to bring people together across differences but around shared values, you can take on powerful adversaries and create change that would otherwise be impossible.

I hope you will enjoy reading about the progress we have made, working simultaneously on local projects, in our state capitals and in Washington, D.C. — and always standing shoulder to shoulder with members of the communities where we work and a diverse array of committed partners.

We are incredibly grateful for our members and supporters who make this work possible, and whose deep commitment and ongoing generosity allow us to bring our very best to this demanding work every day, together.

With sincere appreciation from Appalachian Voices' team,



Tom

Tom Cormons
Executive Director

ADVOCATING FOR CLEAN ENERGY ACROSS APPALACHIA



Dedicated advocacy by Appalachian Voices and its partners paid off this year when Virginia committed to rejoining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a multi-state program aimed at reducing carbon emissions from power plants across the Eastern U.S.

Big Wins in Virginia

Earlier this year, Appalachian Voices and our partners defeated all sixteen bills introduced to repeal or weaken portions of the Virginia Clean Economy Act and went on to **score game-changing legislative wins for clean energy in the state, including:**

- Virginia's commitment to rejoin the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a program that forces fossil fuel power plants to reduce their carbon emissions over time and uses a market structure where cleaner power resources have the advantage. The money generated by the program's fees is then used to address the impacts of climate change and lower residential electric bills.
- A new law requiring utilities to dramatically increase their energy storage resources to levels that match the expert energy modeling
- The passage of a bill that will give customers of Appalachian Power and Virginia's electric cooperatives the opportunity to opt in to programs where lots of small energy resources (like a fleet of electric vehicles parked for the night) can be used to meet electricity demand instead of new gas-fired power plants.
- A new law that will triple the size of Appalachian Power's Shared Solar program by 2028, providing cheaper renewable energy for its customers.

Community-Focused Solar Projects Power Up

For more than five years, Appalachian Voices has managed the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund, which connects community-serving solar projects in Central Appalachia to funding sources and technical assistance.

Over that time, the fund has supported **95 solar projects in six Central Appalachian states**, adding 8.8 megawatts of electricity to the grid and avoiding more than 10,819 tons of carbon emissions annually. With the fund's support, nonprofits, schools, public institutions, and small businesses are strengthening their budgets, attracting new investment, and enhancing long-term resilience — while replacing fossil fuel electricity with clean, locally produced renewable energy.

Learn more about the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund:

SolarFinanceFund.org/impacts/



More Energy-Efficient Buildings for Virginia's Coalfields

This year, Appalachian Voices selected the first recipients for its Building Upgrade Program, a pilot initiative in the historic coalfield region of Southwest Virginia developed using prize funds from the U.S. Department of Energy.

Through the program, **up to 15 buildings will receive weatherization and other upgrades** that will enable them to reduce energy use and prepare for potential future installation of solar and battery systems. These upgrades will position local facilities to serve as community resilience hubs in the event of flooding or other disasters, while reducing daily operating costs.

Trades Get a Boost in Rural Tennessee

This year in Tennessee, we advanced the development and deployment of a Rural Apprenticeship Readiness Program with our partners. This initiative will **bring technical education to rural students** in former coal communities and other rural areas who are interested in entering the building and construction trades. The program will create a pathway to good jobs for highly skilled workers like electricians in rural areas that struggle with high unemployment rates. It will also ensure that expertise to install and maintain utility-scale clean energy projects will be available locally.

In July, our team joined residents of ElderSpirit, a mixed-income, over-55 community in Abingdon, Virginia, to celebrate the unveiling of new rooftop solar arrays made possible through the Appalachian Solar Finance Fund. Photo by Dina Hornbaker/Solar Holler





STANDING STRONG AGAINST FOSSIL FUELS

This year, Appalachian Voices doubled down on its fight against new fossil fuel infrastructure in our region, where we continue to battle nearly 40 gigawatts of new methane gas power plants, and the pipelines that serve them, that are proposed or under construction. This is twice the amount of new gas that utilities proposed just two years ago, and it would add more polluting fossil-fuel electricity than the total electricity currently produced by North Carolina. We've supported community members as they've successfully organized to stop permits for destructive projects this year. And we'll continue to help these communities push back as utility companies seek new ways to build these polluting facilities.

The case for large-scale clean energy and battery storage has never been clearer. Technologies that are kindest to the

environment are also kindest to customers' pocketbooks, and they are more than capable of meeting future energy demand. But the federal government has pressured energy companies to reverse course, wasting millions of taxpayer and electric customer dollars by propping up old coal plants that were set to retire.

Driven by gutted federal regulations, as well as speculative and real data center growth, utilities across the region are also rushing to propose massive new fossil fuel projects.

In North Carolina this summer, Duke Energy, which is pursuing a massive build-out of new methane gas electricity, sought to raise residential rates by up to 18%. This would be a tremendous blow to low-income and fixed-income residents.

In response, Appalachian Voices helped to organize public opposition and outreach to state lawmakers. More than 275 people spoke out against the rate hike at a public utilities commission hearing. By July, Duke had slashed its residential rate increase in half for the western part of the state, and the pressure is on to make Duke do more.

In Virginia, we wrote and promoted a bill that would penalize utility companies for choosing to run coal-fired power plants during periods when cheaper, cleaner alternatives are available. The bill passed this year and was signed into law.

It was an important win for the people. Between 2015 and 2025, Virginia customers of Appalachian Power and Dominion Energy overpaid for energy from coal plants by more than \$1.4 billion because of the utilities' practice of scheduling their coal plants as

"must run," even when cheaper power was available.

Meanwhile **in Tennessee**, the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors voted unanimously — and without public input — to continue operating its Kingston and Cumberland coal plants indefinitely, instead of retiring them as planned. TVA had long said keeping the coal plants open would increase costs for customers and create serious reliability concerns, using the planned retirements to justify new methane gas plants and pipelines. Now, TVA plans to operate coal and gas side-by-side at each site, and pointed

to increased electricity demand from data centers as the primary reason for this change.

In response, Appalachian Voices and our partners at the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Center for Biological Diversity, and the Sierra Club have

continued ▶

Patricia Smarsh and her husband, Jeffrey Gilliam, stand in their front yard, torn up by construction on the Ridgeline Expansion Project, a 122-mile-long methane gas pipeline in Tennessee. Photo by Abby Hassler



Residents of Guilford and Forsyth counties showed their opposition to a multi-state methane gas expansion project at a North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality water permit hearing in Kenersville, N.C. Photo by Iximche Media



against fossil fuels

pursued legal action against TVA for operating the plants without an appropriate Clean Air Act permit. The Cumberland Fossil Plant and Cumberland Gas Plant alone are projected to release 4,700 tons of smog-forming nitrogen oxides, 8,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, and 1,500 tons of fine particulate matter each year.

Appalachian Voices remains committed to shining a light on such harmful and often illegal practices, and to ensuring local voices of opposition are elevated and heard.



Above: The Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant is one of the utility's dirtiest, least reliable, and most expensive power plants, as well as the site of a devastating coal ash spill in 2008. Photo by Abby Hassler



A lack of smart regulation for data center development is leading to an increase in fossil fuel energy use. This brings increased air and climate pollution and can cause a rapid rise in electric bills, in addition to strains on local water supplies and local noise pollution from data centers alone.

Appalachian Voices believes that community members deserve fair treatment and should be meaningfully involved in decisions about if and how data centers are built in their communities. We're advocating for policies that bring more transparency, make sure data centers pay their own way, and require data center developers to protect communities and our air and water.

FIGHTING COAL MINING'S DESTRUCTIVE IMPACT



Standing Up

Appalachian Voices celebrated several successes this year in our longstanding battle against the devastating impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining.

Standing Up for Wildlife

In response to a case brought by the Center for Biological Diversity and Appalachian Voices, a federal court ruled that the Trump-Vance administration's attempts to undercut the Endangered Species Act for the sake of coal mining were illegal. The celebrated decision required coal mines to fully account for their threats and harms, and to do more to ensure that imperiled wildlife aren't pushed to extinction for dirty fossil fuel profits.



Shortly after the ruling, however, the administration issued a new regulation that gutted Endangered Species Act habitat protections. While our partners

litigate that devastating regulatory change, our team continues to push back against harms caused by specific mining operations across Appalachia, including in areas that are home to rare and endangered species.



Better Benefits for Miners and Their Families

More than 80 local governments from Appalachian coal communities have passed resolutions backing a bill that would increase black lung disability payments that miners and their families receive. The Support Our Miners Act, introduced in the U.S. House in June, would raise disability benefits to meet the higher cost of living and adjust them for inflation going forward.

More Oversight of Mine Cleanup

Members of Congress introduced three bills to address the root causes of the idled or "zombie" coal mine crisis. Two bills aim to close loopholes in the law governing bonding for mine cleanup. The third sets more specific timelines and requirements for mine cleanup and water quality protections.



for wildlife

PLANTING NATIVE FORESTS ON MINE-SCARRED LAND



This spring, with help from bulldozers, tree planters, and the local community, Appalachian Voices cleared the invasive autumn olive shrub from a 193-acre former coal mine site near Clinchco, Virginia. Then we planted 102,300 bare-root seedlings from 24 tree and shrub species, and spread a mix of wildflower and pollinator seeds over the exposed soil. This summer, we saw wildflowers bloom and wildlife, such as quail and wild turkeys, return as our land restoration efforts continued.

In the coming years, we'll continue to steward the site and suppress invasive plants while the seedlings establish and grow, ultimately returning a native forest to the site. Based on community feedback, we included fruit and nut trees in the mix and made space for forageable food plots.

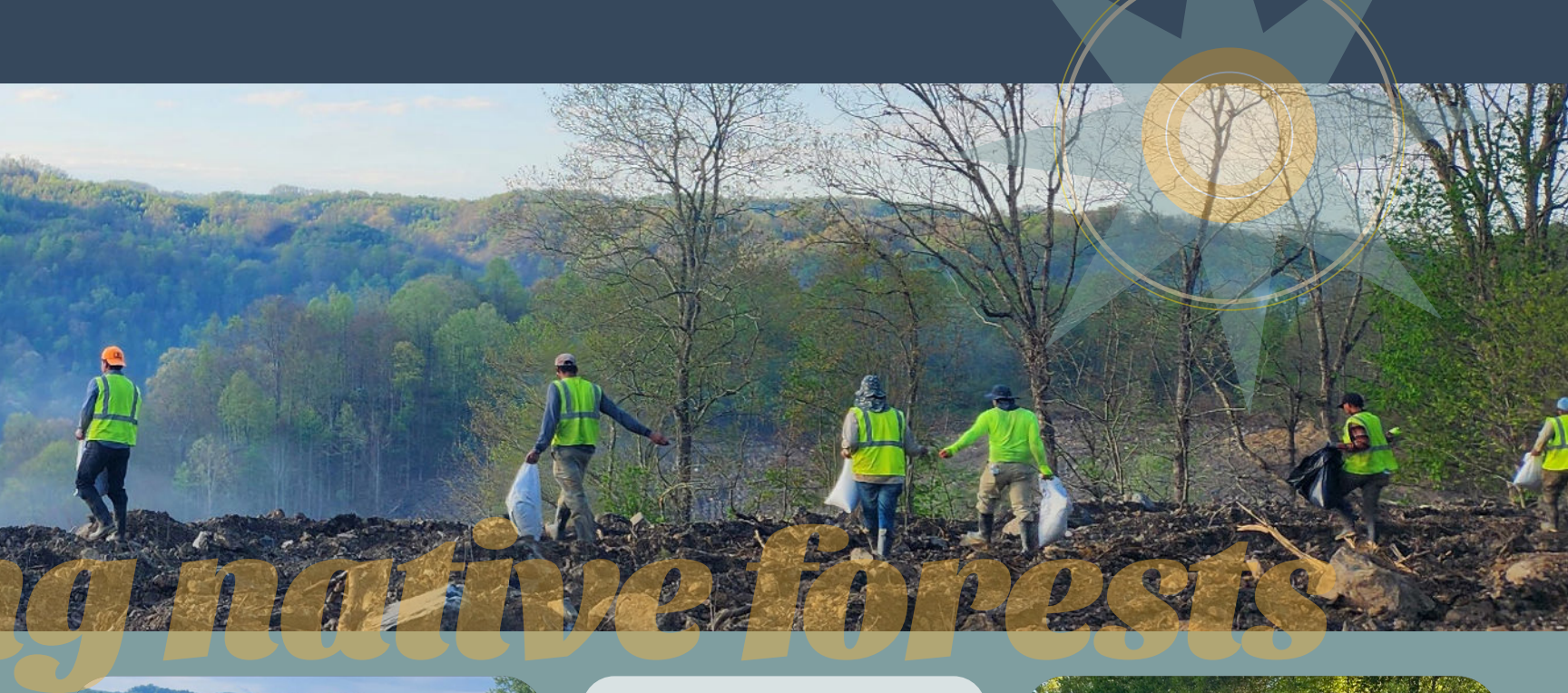
The site is fairly representative of many mines in the region that were either poorly reclaimed or remain unreclaimed.

This multi-generational project explores ways to fund mineland restoration on a larger scale. Our land stewardship offers the immediate benefit of carbon sequestration through green space, and demonstrates ways to heal mine-scarred land over time by restoring a healthy native hardwood forest that supports local wildlife.

Above: In spring, a tree-planting crew spread native plant seeds at our mineland restoration site after invasive species were removed. Photo by Liz Holloway

Opposite, left: By summer, pollinator-friendly firewheel flowers (Gaillardia pulchella) and other plants were thriving, rebuilding a healthy natural system.

Opposite, right: A family participates in a community tree-planting day at the Dickenson County, Virginia, site.



MINELAND
ReLeaf

Learn how we are transforming a
former mine into a healthy forest:



AppVoices.org/mine-to-forest



RURAL RESURGENCE: REPORTS FROM CLIMATE DISASTER'S FRONT LINES



In communities across Appalachia, devastating floods in recent years have sparked important, much-needed conversations about the best ways to lessen damage from future climate disasters and ensure those efforts benefit the community as a whole.

In Pennington Gap, **Virginia**, community meetings we facilitated helped to kickstart the long-anticipated demolition of an abandoned grocery store and transform it into a green space to help protect the community from flooding. In nearby Pound, community members unveiled a new historical monument designed as a stage, titled “Labor in Motion.” The stage is the cornerstone of a downtown park, the construction of which repaired landslide damage at a major intersection and demolished a building that had become a hazardous eyesore.



Above: Community members gather for the April unveiling of the “Labor in Motion” stage and artwork. The project is a collaboration between town leaders, community members, Appalachian Voices, and Virginia Tech’s Monuments Across Appalachian Places initiative.

Right: Stained-glass art, representing a nearby tunnel once used by coal trains, centers the new community stage. The stage serves as a monument to the town’s labor history as well as a local gathering place.



Appalachian Voices is also working alongside local partners to transform two buildings in Scott County, Virginia — the Dungannon Historic Depot and the Appalachian Harvest food hub in Duffield — into community resilience hubs. Resilience hubs are trusted spaces that meet community needs on a day-to-day basis and can keep people safe during emergencies by

Rural resu

providing access to food, electricity, and other resources. The hubs include solar arrays with battery storage, saving money on electric costs year-round and allowing the hubs to operate when the power goes out.

In **Western North Carolina**, where Hurricane Helene left devastation and hard lessons, Appalachian Voices and its partners have been hosting “Know Your Risks” and “Prepare in a Year” gatherings in multiple counties. At these events, community members learn about hazards from landslides, wildfires, and floods and how they can better prepare and protect their homes, properties, and families.



Appalachian Voices team member Lou Murrey speaks at a monthly community resilience workshop series in Old Fort, N.C., in partnership with West Marion, Inc. Photo by Abby Hassler



Solar Bee trailers provide emergency power where and when needed, supporting critical response needs such as water filtration and satellite communications. Pictured: Appalachian Voices team members Kristin Stroup and Ridge Graham.

In **Western North Carolina**, Appalachian Voices and our partners are helping to deploy two solar microgrid trailers — mobile stations equipped with sufficient solar and battery capacity to power a mid-sized fire station for days. Each trailer can also support multiple critical response needs such as water filtration, satellite communications, mobile medical clinics, and power tools.

These mobile microgrids complement 24 stationary solar and battery storage microgrids being deployed across Western North Carolina to ensure vital community places that were stranded without grid power during and after Helene can keep operating during extreme conditions in the future. We are proud to be a partner in this project bringing energy and communications redundancy to fire stations, community centers, health centers, libraries, and more — places that will benefit from energy cost savings when skies are blue and be better prepared to serve their communities when the next prolonged outage comes.

Fighting for

FIGHTING FOR CLEAN WATER IN WEST VIRGINIA



We joined Southern West Virginia residents and advocates to take the case for clean drinking water to Washington, D.C., Armed with an example of contaminated water from one resident's community, we met with congressional staff members to advocate for improved water infrastructure. Photo by Jay Mallin

In May, Appalachian Voices partnered with West Virginia Rivers Coalition and From Below to host a trip to Washington, D.C., to advocate for federal funds to address the issue. With bottles of orange, heavy-metal-laden tap water from residents

West Virginia's southern coalfields have faced severe drinking water issues for decades, even as residents pay some of the highest public water rates in the nation. In some cases, these are old coal company towns — when mining ended and the companies left, local governments lacked the resources to maintain the town's infrastructure. Now communities are left with broken and aging systems, where the water they pay for is unreliable for drinking or firefighting due to frequent pipe breaks.

In other cases, current pollution from coal production has contaminated drinking water, leading to heavy metal staining on household appliances, ruining clothing and causing illnesses and skin rashes.

of Southern West Virginia, the group held a dozen meetings with staffers from both the House and Senate appropriators' offices and the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which oversees the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

With the support of the West Virginia congressional delegation, the advocates asked for federal support to improve water infrastructure in the state, including updates to wastewater and drinking water treatment facilities and more. While funding was not included in the House appropriations bill this year, clean water advocates will continue to demand legislative action to solve West Virginia's clean drinking water crisis.



Rev. Caitlin Ware of From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice, Jennifer Imm of Appalachian Voices, and residents of Raleigh County, W.Va., tell legislative staff about the impact of West Virginia's clean drinking water crisis on local communities. Photo by Jay Mallin

clean water

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 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 participation helps us raise 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 2026.

AppVoices.org/get-involved



This year, we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of The Appalachian Voice. In its pages, we investigate the environmental harms facing the people of Appalachia and share stories of communities coming together to build a better future. We prioritize the voices of residents harmed by destructive industries while also honoring the region's culture and natural wonders.

AppVoices.org/voice



For nearly three decades, Appalachian Voices has stood shoulder to shoulder with our neighbors and partners to protect our region's natural heritage from those who would destroy it for their own profit, and to advance practical, forward-thinking solutions that create thriving economies and vibrant places to live.

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



AppVoices.org/giving

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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.



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.