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Data Centers and Microgrids on Their Way to a Neighborhood

Near You BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON



Beware! Huge warehouses full of computers that require vast amounts of energy to process, store, and transmit data 24/7 could be coming to your town. The dot-com bubble in 1997 led to the growth of data centers. The public release of artificial intelligence starting with ChatGPT in late 2022 will quadruple the demand for data centers. A ChatGPT request needs nearly 10 times as much electricity as a typical Google search, according to a report by Goldman Sachs. Data centers generate intolerable noise and light pollution, and consume space and water...and our governor and legislature want them here.

To attract data centers, the WV legislature passed HB 2014, the microgrid bill. A microgrid is a private electricity generator independent of major centralized energy sources. Microgrids that rely on renewable energy with battery storage are a good thing. But, this being West Virginia, the intention of HB 2014 is to keep our fossil fuel production and consumption alive and well. It's a double whammy; old coal-fired power plants will be kept running at ratepayers' expense, and the demand for fracked natural gas will increase in order to run these places that will impose noise and light pollution on nearby communities—a lose-lose deal.



The Guernsey Power Station in Guernsey, Ohio. It is comparable in size to the proposed Fundamental Data plant north of Thomas, WV. The photo does not include adjacent warehouses full of computers. PHOTO BY TOM STONEHUNTER, CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-SHARE ALIKE 4.0 INTERNATIONAL.

Adding insult to injury, the bill strips control from communities, saying that high-impact data centers may not be subject to any local zoning laws. In other words, they can generate as much noise and light pollution as they want, and there's nothing anyone or any community can do about it. What's more, property taxes generated by data centers will mostly go to the state Personal Income Tax Reduction Fund. Tax dollars meant for schools and local public services will go for tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the state's wealthiest households.

By coincidence—or not—an air quality permit to build a microgrid near Thomas and Davis appeared in the *Parsons Advocate* on March 26. The permit application was submitted by Fundamental Data, whose office is in Purcellville, Virginia, with

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

reasons to worry, and to work.

Small, But Mighty!

That was the theme I heard over and over at the recent Sierra Club Chapter Assembly. The Club gathered leaders from every chapter (well, most of them) for four days in April to build networks, learn procedures, and strategize about how to move forward in these trying times.

While our small chapter has many needs, and we live in a challenging region for conservation, we do accomplish a lot, and often more than larger chapters. In large part, that is thanks to our dedicated volunteers—the members who step up to lead outings, help with conservation campaigns, donate funds, and participate on Chapter committees.



BY JIM KOTCON

Like many chapters, many of our members are older, and we would love to get more young families, 20- and 30-somethings, college students, and others of that age group to help achieve our goals. But one of the many interesting things I learned about was the "Third Act" movement. Organized by climate activist Bill McKibben, Third Act is a nonprofit, social welfare organization for people over 60 who work to protect our democracy and the environment.

Older Americans are the fastest-growing part of the population (I am one of them), and we have skills and resources to take on Washington and Wall Street. We have kids and grandkids, and we have very real

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET STARTED? I have a goal to have active, working committees for our Chapter this year.

One of the most fun ways is the **Chapter Outings Committee**, but it needs more outings leaders. Contact the Outings Chair, Chris Craig, to learn how. National Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous talks about how our outings program builds membership and acquaints people with the goals and members of the Club.

Our **Conservation Committee** tackles numerous environmental issues, including local, state, and national campaigns. If you are concerned about climate change, but worry it is too big for you to make a difference, keep in mind that no one has to do it all, but everyone has to do something. Right now, we are concerned about proposals for at least half a dozen large fossil fuel power plants and a couple of large transmission lines, all dedicated to bailing out fossil fuel companies. Meanwhile, costs keep going up, and we are paying for it with our electric bills every month. Contact our Conservation Chair, Bill Price, and ask how you can help.

The **Membership Committee** is dedicated to growing the Chapter. That means tabling and talking to people at events, mostly telling others why the Club, including our outings and conservation work, matter to you. Contact Alex Cole to get involved in some very low-key, fun activities.

Most importantly, the **Fundraising Committee** is dedicated to generating the resources to help cover costs for volunteers and staff, pay the lawyers and experts we need to win cases, expand our education and outreach to the public, and do the mailings and development to win campaigns. Perhaps you might like to help host events, reach out to major donors, or help with grant-writing. These "behind the scenes" efforts enable everything we do. Contact Dani Parent to volunteer.

So while we are indeed "small but mighty," we also need to grow our activity to fend off the unprecedented challenges we now face. **This is your chance to volunteer.**

West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Directory

Email contact for all officers and staff: **sierraclub.wv@gmail.com**Term ends at first meeting of indicated year.

CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Jim Kotcon, Chair	('26)	304-594-3322
Bill Price, Vice Chair	(26)	304-389-8822
Davis Funk	('27)	
Dani Parent	('26)	606-371-9434
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John Harris, CCL Delegate	('27)	347-907-1197

MONONGAHELA GROUP EXCOMM

Elizabeth (ET) Taylor, Chair	('27)	
Michael Attfield, Vice Chair, Chpt. Dele	gate ('26)	
Jim Kotcon, Conservation Chair	('27)	304-594-3322
Betsy Lawson, Secretary	('27)	304-983-2980
Sally Wilts, Treasurer		304-379-7567
Rachel Stevens, Membership		

EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM

Currently Inactive.

For information, contact Chris Craig at ccraig@laurellodge.com.

OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS

Kathy Gregg, Archives/Chapter History	304-472-4055
Bill Price, Conservation	304-389-8822
Alex Cole, Membership	304-767-8687
Chris Craig, Newsletter & Outings	304-433-1260
David Sturm, Political	304-612-0024
Candice Elliott, Treasurer	304-319-2245
Davis Funk Wahmaston	

Davis Funk, Webmaster

Audrey Bennett, WVU Sierra Student Coalition

REGIONAL SIERRA CLUB ORGANIZING STAFF

Honey May, WV Chapter Director	304-356-8774
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Organizer Reyond Coal Campaign	

Finding Fellowship and Fuel for the Work

FROM THE DIRECTOR: Reflections from Sierra Club Leaders' Meeting

BY HONEY MAY



This panel shared thoughts with Sierra Club leaders at the April gathering in Lebanon, TN. L to R: Author and Third Act Founder Bill McKibben; Dr. Charlotte Keys, Jesus People Against Pollution; Karenna Gore, Center for Earth Ethics; and Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous. PHOTO BY HONEY MAY.

In late April, I traveled to Lebanon, Tennessee, for the Sierra Club's All Managers Meeting and Chapter Assembly—a gathering that, for me, was equal parts reunion and reflection. I was honored to represent our West Virginia Chapter, along with our chapter chair, Dr. Jim Kotcon. Nestled in a landscape not unlike our own corner of West Virginia, the setting felt familiar: rolling hills, rural roads, and people who care deeply about their communities, even if they don't always call themselves environmentalists.

At first, I was hesitant.
I'll admit that I sometimes struggle

with fully claiming my identity as a Sierra Club leader. Not because I don't believe in the work—we're doing vital, visionary organizing—but because in places like mine, that label can feel like a barrier. Rural West Virginians are often painted as opponents to environmental progress, when in fact many of us are simply trying to keep the water clean and the land intact for future generations.

What I found in Lebanon was a reminder that I'm not alone in that tension. I sat with leaders from across the country who are also working in politically complex, economically strained, and culturally rich regions. We shared stories,

strategies, and more than a few laughs. We talked about power-building, policy fights, burnout, and how to sustain ourselves in this long-haul work. I was especially moved by the honesty in our conversations—about what's working, what's not, and what's possible when we stand together.

One of the most powerful moments came when Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous spoke about the importance of audacious hospitality. He reminded us that if we want to grow our movement, we must ensure that people who seek us out feel welcomed from the moment they arrive—not just included, but truly seen, valued, and invited in. That resonated deeply with me. He also urged us to build "uncomfortably large coalitions"—alliances that may stretch

our comfort zones but are essential if we're serious about driving big, lasting change. Those words are still echoing in my mind, challenging me to think bigger, invite wider, and risk discomfort in pursuit of solidarity.

More than anything, I came home with a renewed sense of purpose and possibility. Our work in West Virginia matters—not just because of what we're fighting against, but because of what we're fighting for. Clean air. Safe water. Dignity for working people. A future that honors both our natural resources and our human potential.

Inset Photo: Getting some inspiration (and a bit of fun) at the Sierra Club Leaders gathering in April at Lebanon, TN: WV Chapter Director Honey May; Amy Kelly, SC Field Organizing Strategist for the Tennessee Valley Region; and SC Director of the Outdoors for All Campaign Gerry Seavo James. PHOTO BY HONEY MAY.

Public Weighs in on Corridor H at Wardensville Hearing

At an April 22 public hearing in Wardensville, West Virginia, environmental groups from both West Virginia and Virginia called for an updated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Wardensville to Virginia line section of the long-controversial Corridor H highway.

Citizens expressed concerns about the Town of Wardensville's drinking water and about the seizing of private farmland by the state for highway construction, the degrading of the George Washington National Forest, and the loss of business on a bypassed Main Street. Fifty people attended the hearing in person, and thirty attended online. Some speakers had come from Virginia—an hour-long drive.



BY LOKI KERN

CAMPAIGN ORGANIZER, FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER

WV Division of Highways (WVDOH) and the Federal Highway Administration released an Environmental Assessment (EA) on April 1, a less-comprehensive document than an EIS, the last of which was done in 1996. The current process ends with either a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or with creating a new EIS. WVDOH's timetable calls for construction on the Wardensville section to begin later this year, assuming that the EA process results in a FONSI. The public may comment on the EA until June 1.

Corridor H is the last-built of the Appalachian Corridor Highways, conceived in the 1960s to boost rural economic development. Several speakers at the hearing pointed out that times have changed, and local farm and tourist business has grown. Further, since 1995, the Commonwealth of Virginia has not included Corridor H in its design or funding plans meaning that the highway's originally planned terminus at I-66 and I-81 is questionable. WVDOH designs, shown in the EA, call for the four-lane to abruptly become two lanes at the Virginia state line. Shenandoah County (VA) and the Town of Strasburg, Virginia, passed resolutions in 2022 reaffirming their opposition to building Corridor H in Virginia.

Loki Kern of Friends of Blackwater recorded all the speakers at the April 22 hearing on YouTube, which can be watched on the website savewardensville.org. Kern said WVDOH had turned down the Save Wardensville Coalition's request to broadcast the hearing on Zoom, so the group decided to do their own recording. The Save Wardensville Coalition includes Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley, Friends of Blackwater, Stewards of the



Wardensville, WV, in the path of Corridor H. PHOTO BY OLIVIA MILLER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY.

Potomac Highlands, Virginia Wilderness Committee, and West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

The April 22 meeting's tone was somber. Most speakers opposed the highway and spoke of the direct consequences the construction will have on their lives. Even the supporters of the highway recognized that Virginia did not want this built and that the project's future was uncertain.

Attendee Lewis Leslie Strosnider relayed a message from his hospitalized sister Cindy Cain Strosnider Orndorff. "[If Corridor H is completed], Wardensville

will be a ghost town. Landowners will lose their land for pennies on the dollar. Our farm has been in the family since 1877. Native trout streams will be destroyed, [as will] the Tuscarora Trail on top of the mountain."

Much of the 100-mile four-lane is complete between Elkins and Wardensville, except for two environmentally-sensitive sections in Hardy and Tucker County. WVDOH estimates the Hardy section will cost \$485 million and Tucker County to cost over \$800 million. Environmental groups assert that the streams, forests, wildlife, and residents' way of life are more valuable

than what would be gained by an expanded highway. An updated EIS, they say, could more accurately analyze the costs and benefits.

For those who'd like to help, please visit **savewardensville. org/take-action**, where we've compiled suggested comments and other ways to make a difference. When commenting, make sure to emphasize that the community needs a full EIS to properly analyze the economic, environmental, and social consequences this highway will have on Hardy County.

For more information, email loki@saveblackwater.org.



Route 55, soon to be expanded into Corridor H? PHOTO BY OLIVIA MILLER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY.

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Water Concerns Move Jefferson County to Nix Bottling Plant

The Washington High School auditorium was packed with nearly five hundred residents, many of whom shared their concerns with the Jefferson County Planning Commission concerning the Sidewinder Enterprises Mountain Pure water bottling facility proposed for the Middleway region of Jefferson County. While the meeting started at 7:00 p.m. on March 11, the final vote did not come until 3:00 a.m. the following morning.

Following testimony from over 125 residents (with all but three of their comments in opposition) and nearly 1,700 written comments, the Jefferson County Planning Commission voted unanimously to reject the proposal. The concept plan detailed a cumulative 1 million square foot facility, with potential to extract over 1.7 million gallons of water per day. This was the Planning Commission's second meeting taking up this concept plan, after the November 12, 2024 meeting ended with a decision that the initial concept plan was "incomplete."

At both the November and March meetings, residents raised concerns regarding water insecurity, harm to rare wetlands, unmanageable truck traffic and water pipeline development through Middleway's historic district, and the fact that groundwater extraction is a prohibited use within Jefferson County zoning regulations.

The chronic <u>drought conditions</u> (tinyurl. com/jco-drought) across the Eastern Panhandle and the entire state of West Virginia prompted additional concerns for residents, with many fearing that residential and agricultural wells could run dry if this proposal were to move forward. Sidewinder

MARIA RUSSO

POLICY SPECIALIST,
WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION

DR. NATHANIEL "THAN" HITT SENIOR SCIENTIST, WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION

LYNN DELLES

DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, JEFFERSON COUNTY FOUNDATION



Nearly 500 people attended a March 11 public hearing on the proposed Mountain Pure water bottling plant in Jefferson County—almost all spoke in opposition. PHOTO COURTESY OF WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS COALITION.

Enterprises, the California-based investment company responsible for this proposal, had representatives at the meeting who spoke about the company's willingness to provide water use limitations and other promises in an effort to assuage concerns.

The facility's proposed location is the former 3M/Kodak plant in Middleway, prompting residents to raise concerns of legacy pollution at the site. Some speakers urged the company to complete water quality monitoring prior to moving forward with the plan.

The Planning Commission's vote to reject the proposal was a victory for organizations that had been working alongside residents to combat this development.

Several organizations joined together to oppose the project, including Jefferson County Foundation, Protect Middleway, Jefferson County Farmland Protection Board, Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, Potomac Valley Audubon Society, Conservation WV, and WV Rivers. In January, the Preservation Alliance added Middleway to its West Virginia Endangered Properties List given the threat this project posed.

Leading up to the meeting, Jefferson County Foundation prepared a 120-plus page briefing binder outlining their concerns, which was presented to the Planning Commission and referred to during public comment at the meeting.

Local municipalities also got involved in the comment periods, with both Harpers Ferry and Shepherdstown Town Councils sending letters in opposition to the project.

"We all need clean water," said **Maria Russo, Policy Specialist with WV Rivers.** "This win shows the power and resilience of our communities, as well as the deep connection that people have to the land and the water that sustains us. This is larger than any one project, this is about protecting our way of life."

"The science didn't hold up," said **Than Hitt, Senior Scientist with WV Rivers.** "The applicants used a groundwater modeling tool that was inappropriate for karst terrain—even though their own data showed massive caves and karst feature—and that gave us low confidence that this project would be safe for residential wells, farms, and wetlands nearby."

While this vote was a huge victory for the coalition of organizations that teamed up to raise concerns about this proposal, many recognize that the war on our water resources has only just begun.

Sidewinder Enterprises LLC filed a lawsuit in Jefferson County Circuit Court on April 10, alleging the Jefferson County Planning Commission did not have the authority to deny the concept plan for Sidewinder's proposed groundwater extraction and bottling plant in Middleway. Jefferson County Foundation, an Eastern Panhandle nonprofit,

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WVEC LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP:

What We Stopped, And What's Next

BY LUCIA VALENTINE AND KASEY RUSSELL, WVEC LOBBYISTS

This session, we worked hard to hold the line against a wave of legislation threatening West Virginia's air, water, and public lands. Through strong advocacy and the support of our partners, we successfully defeated several harmful bills.



The Community Air Monitoring bill never made it to committee, thus protecting vital programs that inform residents about local air quality. Efforts to weaken the Above Ground Storage Tank Act, which would have endangered drinking water, were stopped in the House. The so-called "Sound Science in Regulations Act"—a blatant attempt to censor science for the benefit of polluters—was also defeated, thanks to the leadership of our coalition partners at WV Rivers Coalition and the support of public health experts.

We're also proud to have helped block multiple attempts to open public lands to ATV and ORV use, as well as carbon storage legislation that would have undermined protections of our state parks. While we remain concerned about the Microgrid Bill and its potential impacts on local control and water resources, this session was a strong reminder of what's possible when we work together to protect West Virginia's environment.

Our efforts and successes are only possible with our member groups and partners. They provide support in many ways: technical advice on legislation, perspective on lobbying strategy, and financial support. Thank you to Sierra Club's WV Chapter, WV Rivers Coalition, WV Citizen Action Group, WV Highlands Conservancy, West Virginians for Public Lands, Conservation West Virginia, The Downstream Project, Greenbrier River Watershed Association, Buckhannon River Watershed Association, West Virginians for Energy Freedom, Solar United Neighbors, and WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization.

Above: Lucia Valentine (L) and Kasey Russell served as the WV Environmental Council's lobbyists during the 2025 legislative session. PHOTO COURTESY OF WVEC.

Bills of Concern That Passed

CATEGORY A (HB 2233)

This bill weakens drinking water protections for certain rivers and streams in West Virginia. The bill ultimately passed after a lengthy debate in the House and Senate, that cited drinking water and procedural concerns. Industry language was amended into the bill after the legislative rule-making process, which drew criticism from advocates and legislators alike. We will continue monitoring the changes to ensure we protect drinking water.

AUTHORIZING WV DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS TO ERECT WARNING SIGNS (SB 794)

This legislation passed on the last day of session and authorizes the WV DOH to install warning signs that advise motorists about unimproved or primitive roads. Our concerns with the bill include the potential to encourage the use of high-clearance,



four-wheel drive vehicles. We will monitor the implementation to ensure appropriate protections from ATV/ORV use remain in place.

MICROGRID/DATA CENTERS (HB 2014)

This bill passed on the last night of session after weeks of deliberation. While changes were made to give more taxes back to the counties where data centers are located, no changes were made to address concerns over local control, water use issues, or energy sources. We will monitor the implementation of this bill as we expect constitutionality concerns to arise.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION (SB 627)

This bill originally opened up our state parks to drilling and storing carbon (carbon sequestration) in pore spaces underlying our state parks. Thanks to the strong pressure and opposition from the public lands community, Chairman Jeffries (R-Putnam) amended the language before the Senate Economic Development Committee meeting. The committee substitute was a vast improvement, protecting state parks from surface disturbances and establishing a 200 ft. setback requirement for well pads. We will keep monitoring the progress of this new policy, as the practice of carbon storage is still unproven.



Tyler Cannon (on right), WV Climate Alliance Coordinator, testifies before the House Energy and Public Works Committee on SB 592 during an April 7 hearing. PHOTO BY PERRY BENNETT. WV LEGISLATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY.

Good Bills That Died

RIVER ACCESS BILL (SB 801)

This bill would have ensured public access to the state's rivers and streams for recreational purposes. While it passed out of



the Senate, it was referred to the House Government Organization Committee, where it passed the bill hearing stage but never made it back on the agenda for passage. The bill faced opposition from the WV Farm Bureau and other stakeholder groups. We will continue to support

Senator Woodrum's (R-Summers) efforts to establish river access points in the future.

ORPHAN WELL PROTECTION ACT (SB 11)

The bill required oil and gas well operators to set money aside for future plugging costs so taxpayers wouldn't be left footing the bill. The bill was referred to the Senate Energy, Industry, and Mining Committee but was never taken up. We want to thank Senate President Smith (R-Preston) for sponsoring



this bill yet again, and we will continue to educate lawmakers about the importance of addressing WV's orphan well crisis.

ADDITIONAL GOOD BILLS we followed included initiatives introduced by Delegate Hansen (D-Monongalia) and other House Democrats. These initiatives included HB 2412 (incentive for large solar projects on degraded land), HB 2418 (energy efficiency), HB 2555 (Public Service Commission reform bill), HB 2855 (relating to a county's ability to regulate floodplains under The National Flood Insurance Program guidelines), and HB 3173 (temporary cap on electricity rates). Unfortunately, none of these bills passed.

Bills of Concern That Died

WIND POWER (HB 3048)

This bill would have limited the number of permits to construct wind power plants, wind power farms, or "windmills" for power generation in West Virginia. Further, it would have (1) required that for each new wind-powered facility built in West Virginia, there is an offset in the amount of taxes paid by new and



existing coal-fired power plants and (2) ensured that coal remains the primary source of power in West Virginia during emergency weather events.

Several bills were introduced this session to curb wind and solar projects while incentivizing coal and natural gas use. Most of them did not make it onto a committee agenda.

ABOVEGROUND STORAGE TANKS (SB 592)

Defeating this bill was our hardest-fought victory. The bill initially passed the Senate 25-7 with nearly all of the Kanawha County delegation voting for it (except for Senator Bartlett-R). It passed out of the House Energy and Public Works Committee with only Delegates Hansen and Young (D-Kanawha) voting against it. As in past years, this bill sought to deregulate tanks located in Zones of Critical Concern closest to drinking water intakes. The bill was moved to the House inactive calendar on the second to last day of session, where it ultimately died. Thanks to all who helped hold the line against this dangerous bill!



Sierra Club WV Chapter Director Honey May speaks out against SB 592 on E-Day at the Capitol. Along with other environmental leaders, she called on lawmakers to reject efforts to weaken drinking water protections.

PHOTO BY PERRY BENNETT, WV LEGISLATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY.

COMMUNITY AIR MONITORING (SB 575)

This bill would have threatened community air monitoring programs in WV—programs that help West Virginians identify and understand air quality where they live, work, and play. Despite intense pressure from industry to run the bill, we want to thank Senator Rucker (R-Jefferson) for hearing our concerns and not running the bill in the Senate Government Organization Committee.

ATVs (SB 711)

This bill would have opened our state parks to ATVs. Thanks to immense pressure from our public lands community (and the fact that the bill was considered on Environmental Day!), the Senate Transportation Committee did not take it up.

ANTI-SCIENCE BILL (HB 2493)

The so-called "Sound Science in Regulations Act" would have prevented state agencies from using public health research and the best available science for regulatory purposes. National interest groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, supported the bill, but it faced strong opposition not just from the environmental community but also state agencies and the coal industry. The bill had a hearing stage in the House Health Committee but never returned to the agenda for passage.

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Beyond Coal

Growing up in West Virginia, I knew I was lucky. I grew up on a farm in Monongalia County, where we had cows, chickens, horses, quails, pheasants, and sometimes ducks and rabbits. We caught crawdads in the creeks and perch or sunfish in the ponds—ponds where we skated in the winter or swam in the summer. Hunting for morels and ramps in the spring and paw paws in the fall was always something I looked forward to—and something I still do. That connection to nature and our farm made me who I am, and I still help my mom in the gardens and around the farm. Our dilly beans are the best around, and if you ask, I'll share our recipe.



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

ORGANIZER, BEYOND COAL CAMPAIGN

Dilly Bean Recipe

Makes 4 Pints

INGREDIENTS

- 2 lbs. of fresh green beans, cleaned, ends removed (try to match their length to the height of the jars)
- 4 heads of dill (from your garden or a friend's)
- 4 cloves of garlic, cleaned
- 2 1/2 cups of vinegar
- 2 1/2 cups of water
- 1 tsp. Cayenne pepper
- salt

DIRECTIONS

Sterilize jars and lids in boiling water. Pack beans upright in pint jars, making sure that the length of the beans fits the height of the jar. (You want the tips of the beans to be covered by the liquid in the jar.) To each pint jar, add ½ tsp of cayenne pepper, 1 clove of garlic, and 1 dill head.

On the stove, combine water, vinegar, and ½ cup salt; bring to a boil. Pour hot water mix over beans-don't fill the jars too full, but ensure that the tops of the beans are covered. Gently screw on the sterilized lids and carefully lower into a separate pot of boiling water to process for ten minutes. Remove and let cool; listen for jar lids to "pop" to ensure they are sealed. (If a jar doesn't seal, keep it in the fridge and use it up first.)

Even when I left the state, for grad school, to live in other countries, or to work elsewhere, my aim was always to come back. When I got the opportunity to return and teach at West Virginia University, my alma mater, I jumped at the chance. For nearly 20 years I taught at WVU, helping to educate the young people from our state and beyond. When that career ended, I knew I wanted to stay in my home state and continue to make a difference in my community. It may sound cliché, but I couldn't imagine just doing a job; I wanted to feel like I was doing good work for my fellow West Virginians. The Sierra Club offered me the opportunity to stay and work in my beautiful state and to continue to give back to the place I love.

As the Beyond Coal Campaign Organizer for WV, I know we face daunting opposition. The coal industry has spent decades convincing residents that we're lucky to be exploited, to have our mountains gutted and our streams filled with toxic waste, and that we should be glad to breathe polluted air and drink contaminated water because, without coal, we'd be nothing. That sense of coal as the sole component of our identity is a lie, though; we West Virginians are much more than just some minerals in the ground.

But in order for folks to begin to see a future where coal isn't king, we need to get to work. We need to build a movement to oppose the uneconomic generation of power at coal-fired plants that jack up our utility rates just to ensure that coal companies make big profits. We need to engender a culture of energy efficiency and welcome renewables. We need to develop our own identity, one that lifts up our neighbors and ensures their health and success, one that takes pride in who we are and where we're from, one that sees a strong, inspiring future based in the beautiful mountains, rivers, and outdoors we must protect — not only for the next generations, but also for our own economic prosperity.

Coal isn't the boss of us. We are.

It's time we demonstrated that West Virginia is much more than coal, though coal will always be part of our story. We are communities that care for our neighbors; hollers with vibrant traditions of folklore, music, art, and food; families that crave a future in which their kids and grandkids stay in West Virginia because of good jobs and great places to live.

Over the coming months, I hope to visit with many of you where you live, to learn your concerns and local energy issues, and to work together to build our base and our organization into a leading force for good in our state. The Sierra Club has a lot to do in our state, and I'm excited to roll up my sleeves and get to work—hand-in-hand with each of you, our great members.

WATER CONCERNS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

has <u>filed a motion to intervene</u> (tinyurl.com/ sidewinder-lawsuit) in the lawsuit brought by Sidewinder Enterprises LLC against the Commission.

Christine Wimer, president of JCF, stated, "the Foundation feels the ordinance and subdivision regulations give the Planning

Commission clear authority to deny such a concept plan as they did after many hours of testimony from the public and thousands of pages of public comment being submitted." If granted, this intervener status will allow the Foundation to protect the historic district of Middleway and the quality and availability of

the groundwater resources Jefferson County residents and businesses rely on, as the Planning Commission's decision currently does.

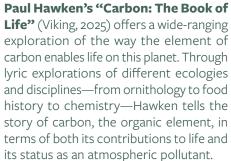
As of mid-April 2025, the Circuit Court had not scheduled proceedings for the case. Residents and organizations remain alert, monitoring the proposed project.

Summer Reading List: Carbon, Reciprocity, and Climate Futures



If you're looking forward to spending the dog days of summer catching up on your reading, you're in luck. Several recent publications offer engaging discussions of

environmental topics sure to appeal to many Sierra Club members. Here are some recommendations:



Marine biologist **Ayana Elizabeth Johnson** asks us to look beyond the despair-driven climate forecasts to imagine possible climate futures with clear-sighted hope. In her engaging book, "What if We Get it Right? Visions of Climate Futures" (Random House, 2024), she curates essays,



BY SARA TORRES

interviews, and poetry that focus on the possible solutions to our climate crisis. Her insights are poignant, often humorous, and always rewarding.

Robin Wall Kimmerer's "The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World" (2025) describes how ecologies operate on the principles of interconnectedness and reciprocity (as opposed to scarcity and competition). As in her earlier book "Braiding Sweetgrass" (2013), Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist, professor, and MacArthur Fellow, draws on Indigenous knowledge to emphasize the importance of generosity in building communities and supporting biodiversity.

MICROGRID | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Casey Chapman as the contact. He is one of three partners of CaseCo, a company that builds high-end homes in Louden County, Virginia—the location of most of the country's data centers.

The proposed power plant, called Ridgeline, would run possibly seven turbines with natural gas and store 30 million gallons of diesel fuel in three 10-million-gallon tanks to run a backup generator. This will be bigger than the Mt. Storm power plant. Based on some industry benchmarks, this could be an investment of \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion just for the power plant. Where is that money coming from? The power plant will only occupy a small portion of the 500 acres indicated in the permit, so there is space for perhaps 12-15 data centers. This industrial monstrosity will be near some of the most beautiful natural areas in WV.

The air quality permit application is heavily redacted and much of the required data is described as "to be determined." There is no mention of a pipeline to transport the natural gas (the Columbia pipeline lies nearby) or where the 30 million gallons of diesel fuel will be coming from. The permit says it will emit 2.05 million tons of carbon dioxide per year. Other emissions include carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, lead, and hazardous air pollutants. Note that microgrids not

selling power to the grid are not subject to greenhouse gas emission restrictions. Leaks from pumps, compressors, valves, or other sources are expected. If water is used for cooling, where will it come from and where will it go? Air, noise, and light pollution are significant concerns, especially for this area that depends on its natural beauty and dark skies to attract tourists.

The site is about two miles north of Thomas and Davis, directly in the path of the Go North alternative route for Corridor H. The permit's appearance in the Parsons newspaper came as a shock to Tucker County officials and residents. Casey Chapman made no attempt to consult with anyone there prior to the permit application and has refused to respond to any questions or appear at the Tucker County public meeting held April 13th. Why? About 200 people turned out for the meeting and another 100 joined via Zoom.

Projects in Mingo and Logan Counties, as well as in Tucker County, filed for air pollution permits in March, and propose very large gasfired electric generating plants. The specific size is redacted in the permits, but based on pollution discharges and other info, these would be at least 400 MW, probably up to 2,900 MW.

Do we want West Virginia to be a sacrifice zone for AI?



Earth Day

WVU students turning out for the campus Earth Day celebration received some goodies at the Sierra Club table. PHOTOS BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO.















LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

ENSURING RELIABLE AND AFFORDABLE ELECTRICITY ACT (SB 505)

Several "big, bad energy bills" were introduced this session, but most failed to progress—except for SB 505, the Ensuring Reliable and Affordable Energy Act. It passed the Senate on March 27 with eleven opposing votes and moved to the House Energy and Public Works Committee, where it was never taken up. Critics argued the bill contradicted its title by requiring uneconomical operation of coal plants, increasing consumer costs, limiting cheaper energy alternatives, and weakening regulatory oversight. There were concerns it might be merged into another, more favorable bill—but that didn't happen. Opposition from utilities played a key role in stopping SB 505.

ESG BILL (SB 850)

This bill was seen as legislative overreach, aiming to control how private companies operate. It included language stating that corporate directors or officers would be presumed to breach their fiduciary duty if they prioritized environmental, social, or governance (ESG) factors over financial interests. Despite being revived in the Senate Banking and Insurance Committee, the bill ultimately failed after being laid over on a second reading on the Senate floor. Strong opposition from major corporations and businesses played a key role in its defeat.

WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT (SB 940)

This bill aimed to block local governments from issuing water pollution permits stricter than state or federal standards, potentially undermining community protections and transparency. It passed both chambers—with limited bipartisan opposition—but ultimately died because the two versions of the bill were never reconciled.

NUCLEAR ENERGY BILL (HB 2205)

This bill, which would have expanded the Public Service Commission's authority to regulate advanced nuclear reactors, passed the House but died after never being placed on the Senate Energy Committee's agenda.

LEARN MORE

You can find the full text of these bills at **wvlegislature.gov** by typing the bill number in the page's search bar.

If you'd like to learn more and be involved in setting the priorities for environmental advocacy in the 2026 legislative season, SAVE THE DATE and join us for the **WVEC Annual Meeting, September 20 at Cedar Lakes Conference Center, Ripley, WV.**

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E-DAY REFLECTION—

Building Environmental Awareness in Charleston



BY JOHN HARRIS



Jim Kotcon and Lisa Di Bartolomeo joined John Harris at a Sierra Club booth on E-Day at the Capitol in March. PHOTO BY JOHN HARRIS.

Participants at this year's WV Environmental Council's Environmental Day at the Capitol (E-Day) marked the event's 35th anniversary. While I had met with senators and representatives previously in the Capitol, this year was my first time participating in E-Day.

That participation really began the night before, by driving from my home in the Northen Panhandle to Morgantown and the home of Sierra Club's WV Chair Jim Kotcon and Treasurer Candice Elliott, who graciously put me up for the night. With Jim at the wheel early on the morning of E-Day, we picked up our Beyond Coal Campaign's West Virginia Organizer Lisa Di Bartolomeo, and the three of us traveled down I-79 to Charleston. After parking, we carried a table display, newsletters, and other material to the Capitol building, where a table was waiting for us under the Rotunda. WV Chapter Director Honey May met up with us at the Capitol, bringing

Jim and Honey spent most of their time networking and lobbying. Lisa divided her time by doing the same and staffing our table. While I spent most of my time welcoming those who came by our table and trying to answer their questions, I also made time to visit the office of one of my senators, deliver to him a copy of our Spring 2025 Newsletter, and briefly talk with him about environmental issues.

our Sierra Club

presence to four.

While I felt truly welcomed and listened to by the senator, when I told him I was at the Capitol for E-Day, I was disappointed when he asked me, "What is E-Day?" His question told me that I, the WV Sierra Club, and all West Virginians concerned about the environment have a lot more work to do to make our presence and environmental concerns known in Charleston.

Protests

Beginning in March and continuing at the time of writing, West Virginians have gathered to protest actions of the Trump Administration and its DOGE attacks on federal budgets and programs. Among other concerns, public lands and environmental protection were cited.













1 & 2: Hundreds gathered downtown in Charles Town in early April. PHOTOS BY RUTH HATCHER.

- 3: March layoffs of Park staff prompted a Harpers Ferry protest in March. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.
- 4 & 5: Morgantown protesters said "Hands Off" at this rally in April.
 PHOTOS BY SARAH BAILEY.
- 6: Around 400 gathered in Lewisburg. PHOTOS BY DIXIE WICKLINE.

New "People's Climate Solutions" Website Features West Virginians' **Climate Activities**

"I want to see a cleaner Charleston, a greener Charleston, and a more connected Charleston," says Quenton King of the Charleston, WV Green Team. He's one of many West Virginians talking about their climate activities on the new People's Climate Solutions website. The website offers an online searchable collection of climate stories and a podcast series featuring West Virginians from all walks of life implementing climate solutions to reduce greenhouse gases and to help move the state toward a cleaner, sustainable future.

Developed by community educators Sandra Fallon of Morgantown and Frances Riemer of Sedona, Arizona, People's Climate Solutions received initial funding from the Appalachian Stewardship Foundation.

According to Fallon, more climate work is happening in West Virginia than people may imagine. Everyone from civic and nonprofit groups to churches and businesses, and from government agencies to farmers, teachers, and individuals, are stepping up and finding ways to reduce heat-trapping gas emissions, save money, and improve our public health.

People's Climate Solutions offers a single place to learn about, share, and be inspired by West Virginians' climate success stories.

Recent People's Climate Solutions podcast episodes discuss topics such as:

- How the Hedgesville, WV Public Library and West Virginia churches harness the sun's energy to power their buildings
- Why West Virginia science teachers are incorporating innovative projects to help students understand the climate crisis and engage in solutions
- How Morgantown and Charleston's citizen advisory "Green Teams" help their communities save money with sustainable

"Highlighting and sharing these stories," says People's Climate Solutions co-founder Frances Riemer, "can help people imagine possibilities for change."



BY SANDRA FALLON

Sandra Fallon (L) and Frances Riemer are the developers of the People's Climate Solution website and podcast.



SUBMIT YOUR CLIMATE STORIES!

People's Climate Solutions wants to hear from everyone in the state who is working to curtail the climate crisis.

If you are making your business or establishment more energy efficient, if your organization is going solar, or if you're finding new ways to farm sustainably or travel with less carbon output, please submit your stories to the website!

Video clips, photos, and story outlines can be uploaded to the website, and submissions will be reviewed and potentially incorporated into print stories or podcasts to be posted on the site.

Help change the trajectory of the climate crisis! Join your fellow West Virginians and send in your climate success stories. peoplesclimatesolutions.org



SATURDAY, JUNE 14 Ice Cream Social

WE ALL SCREAM FOR...









Please join the WV Sierra Club's Mon Group for an ice cream social from 1-4 p.m., Saturday, June 14, at the Gazebo at East Marion Park in Fairmont. There will be homemade ice cream with all the fixin's, and there will be some family-oriented activities. Registration is not required, and the event is free and open to all. Contact ET at etlodo@gmail.com if you have questions.

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Flip-Flop Hikers prepare to make their first state border crossing—from Harpers Ferry, WV into Maryland—at the Flip-Flop Kickoff in April. PHOTO BY ABBIE RICKETTS.

Harpers Ferry Hosts its Tenth Annual Flip-Flop Kickoff

On April 25-27, Harpers Ferry and Bolivar, WV, hosted about 45 Appalachian Trail (AT) Flip-Flop thru-hikers as they began their 2200-mile adventures.

No, it's not about unconventional hiker footwear. Most thru-hikers, those who tackle the entire trail within a period of one year, begin at the north end (Mt. Katahdin, Maine) or south end (Springer Mountain, Georgia) and hike to the opposite end.

In 2015, Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) was concerned about the large number of "Northbounders" and the stress they put on the trail and the small trail towns in Georgia and North Carolina. ATC worked with the Trail and Town Alliance of Harpers Ferry-Bolivar to promote "Flip-Flop" thru-hikes, in which hikers start in the middle of the trail (places like Harpers Ferry), hike to the north end, and later return to hike south. The two towns, later joined by Brunswick, MD, worked with ATC to provide a kickoff for Flip-Floppers.



BY CHRIS CRAIG

The Kickoff and the Flip-Flop concept have proven popular among AT hikers. This year's offerings included the usual hiker workshops, backpack "shakedowns" providing packing advice by seasoned hikers, a historic walk through Harpers Ferry, an AT Trivia Night, and a picnic. ATC Executive Director Sandi Marra and Superintendent Ed Clark of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail addressed attendees on "The State of the Trail" at an ATC reception. And town volunteers sent thru-hikers on their way after the traditional Sunday morning Flip-Flop Flap Jack Breakfast.

LEARN MORE:

- flipflopkickoff.org
- appalachiantrail.org

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DEADLINE FOR THE 2025 FALL ISSUE: AUGUST 9, 2025

Opinions expressed in the Mountain State Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Sierra Club.

Outings

FOR MORE DETAILS on each outing, and to register online, visit: sierraclub.org/west-virginia/events



EVENT Saturday, May 17, 2025

"Protecting our Fungal Future," a guided walk at the WVU Woodlot

Dr. Matt Kasson is an associate professor of forest pathology and mycology at WVU. He will guide us on this walk through the WVU Woodlot, identifying mushrooms and fungi and educating us on the importance of their conservation. The woodlot is a loop through woods and along creeks. The hike is moderate in difficulty, with loose gravel and hills. We will make frequent stops and focus on locating fungi.

Distance: 3 miles**Difficulty:** MODERATE**Duration:** 2 hours

DAY HIKE Sunday, May 18, 2025

Tuscarora Trail, Shockey's Knob to Siler, VA

From our parking and meeting spot, we will carpool to Siler, VA. From there we will climb 2500 feet very gradually on quiet roads and trail. At the Millrace Trail, near Shockey's Knob shelter, we will descend to our parking spot. Due to the carpool, advance reservations are required, and you must be willing to drive or ride with others. The hike is free; donations are welcome

Distance: 7 miles**Difficulty:** MODERATE**Duration:** 3.5 hours



Jim Kotcon (L), is the WV Chapter's newest certified outings leader. He's shown here with Ed Wheeless on Jim's May hike at the Falls of Hills Creek. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



Bicyclists took a break from pedaling the C&O Canal towpath to explore Killiansburg Cave on this Sierra Club ride in May. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, June 7, 2025

Dunkenbarger Loop and Lion's Head, Dolly Sods Wilderness, WV

This rewarding hike winds through spruce and hardwood forests, past streams, waterfalls, and up to scenic views from a famed rock formation. It includes two stream crossings and explores both quiet and popular areas of Dolly Sods. While some steep grades are involved, most of the route follows old logging and railroad roads with decent footing. The rocky scramble up and down Lion's Head is optional. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 8.5 milesDifficulty: DIFFICULTDuration: 6 hours

BIKE RIDE Sunday, June 8, 2025

Allegheny Highlands Trail, Hendricks, WV

The Allegheny Highlands Trail spans 31 miles of non-motorized recreation through towns, farmland, forests, and riverside views. We'll ride an out-and-back route from Hendricks, mostly paved and nearly flat, following Black Fork and Shavers Fork. Highlights include the Western Maryland Railroad Bridge and Depot in Parsons. We'll stop for a picnic and discuss the trail's connection to Corridor H. This ride is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 20 milesDifficulty: MODERATEDuration: 3.5 hours

BIKE RIDE

Saturday, June 28, 2025

C&O Canal towpath, Shepherdstown to Taylor's Landing

This easy ride is appropriate for beginners. We will bike out and back from Shepherdstown. Experienced bikers are welcome but must expect a leisurely pace with the group. There will be many spots with history and pretty views of the Potomac River. This ride is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 16 miles**Difficulty:** EASY**Duration:** 2.5 hours

DAY HIKE

Saturday, July 12, 2025

Appalachian Trail – Old Forge Picnic Area to Caledonia State Park, PA

After a snow cancellation last winter, we're heading back in July to explore another section of the AT in southern Pennsylvania. We'll carpool from Old Forge to Caledonia State Park, then hike up to Chimney Rock—1,000 feet above—before descending back to Old Forge. The trail is well-maintained with a steady grade, but the climb is significant. Due to the shuttle, no dogs are allowed, and participants must be willing to drive or ride with others. This hike is free; donations are welcome

Distance: 7.5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATELY DIFFICULT

Duration: 4 hours



On his May hike at the Falls of Hills Creek, Jim Kotcon shows wooly adelgid attacking the hemlock trees of Monongahela National Forest. PHOTO BY ED WHEELESS.



LEISURE BIKE RIDE Saturday, July 26, 2025

C&O Canal – Taylors Landing to Opequon Junction Hiker-Biker Campsite

This is a leisurely bicycle ride viewing nature and learning about historical spots along the canal towpath. We will be keeping a simple and easy pace. There will be many spots with history and pretty views of the Potomac River. For those interested after the bike ride, we can take an educational boat ride at the Cushwa Basin conducted by the C&O Canal NHP. Boat rides are free. The ride is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 19.8 miles **Difficulty:** EASY **Duration:** 3 hours

DAY HIKE

Saturday, August 2, 2025

Seneca Creek Trail

We will hike from the Seneca Creek Trailhead near Spruce Knob, about three miles to Judy Springs. From there, we will climb through the high meadows for the most spectacular (and remote) scenery in West Virginia. Our return will be along the Huckleberry Trail (and we hope they'll be ripe!). This hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 9 miles

Difficulty: MODERATELY DIFFICULT

Duration: 4.5 hours

LEISURE BIKE RIDE

Saturday, August 9, 2025

C&O Canal – Cushwa Basin to Opequon Junction Hiker-Biker Campsite

This is a leisurely bicycle ride viewing nature and learning about historical spots along the canal towpath. We will be keeping an easy pace, and there will be good views of the Potomac River. For those interested after the bike ride, we can take an educational boat ride at the Cushwa Basin conducted by the C&O Canal NHP. This hike and boat ride are free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 17.6 miles **Difficulty:** EASY **Duration:** 3 hours

DAY HIKE Saturday, August 16, 2025

Harpers Ferry NHP – Schoolhouse Ridge South

Harpers Ferry NHP – Schoolhouse Ridge South

Lying right outside the historic town of Harpers Ferry, Schoolhouse Ridge is the site of old farms, Stonewall Jackson's confederate line in 1862, and rock quarries and woodland near the Shenandoah River. Most of our walk will be through open meadow on mowed trails over rolling terrain. There will be a bit of history to share and some interesting views of nearby sites. There have sometimes been closures of the parking lot and parts of the trail, so register in advance to keep in touch about last-minute changes. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Difficulty: EASY **Duration:** 2.5 hours



Members of the Mon Group explored some early signs (and songs) of spring on this Frog Walk at the WV Botanic Garden. PHOTO BY BETSY LAWSON.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, August 23, 2025

Sleepy Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA)

We will hike in Sleepy Creek WMA to remnants of an abandoned coal mine. We will be on the Tuscarora Trail as well as some connector trails. We will have some good views along the way, along with rolling hills. The elevation gain is about 770 feet. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 5 miles **Difficulty:** MODERATE **Duration:** 3.5 hours

DAY HIKE

Saturday, September 6, 2025

Cheat Canyon Wildlife Management Area and Allegheny Trail

This section is 8-10 miles, depending on whether the Jenkinsburg Bridge is accessible for a shuttle. We will start on the Allegheny Trail at the Friends of Cheat Campground near Albright, WV. If it is accessible, we can take the Railroad Grade Trail to Jenkinsburg. Alternatively, we may park at the Mt. Nebo parking area, so we would stay on the Allegheny Trail to climb out of the canyon. Check for details nearer the date. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 9 miles

Difficulty: MODERATELY DIFFICULT

Duration: 4.5 hours

DAY HIKE

Saturday, September 13, 2025

Tuscarora Trail - North Mountain, VA/WV

Our exploration of the Tuscarora Trail in West Virginia and northern Virginia continues on this walk atop North Mountain between the villages of Gore and Lehew. There will be some good views, including the one from the Pinnacles rock cropping. We may also see a small waterfall. This woodland hike involves 1900 feet of climbing—mostly gradual—and one low water crossing. Because it involves a carpool, reservations are required, and you must be willing to drive or ride with others. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 12 miles **Difficulty:** DIFFICULT

Duration: 7 hours, including carpool

DAY HIKE

Sunday, September 28, 2025

Ziler Loop Trail, Cacapon State Park

On this 5-mile loop we will ascend 1269 feet to stunning views and rocky terrain. Well-behaved dogs are welcome but must be on a leash. The hike is free; donations are welcome.

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATELY DIFFICULT

Duration: 3.5 hours



SUMMER 2025





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You're Invited to the **Next WV Chapter ExCom Meetings**

Get involved. Meet chapter leaders. Learn about issues and opportunities. The WV Chapter Executive Committee (ExCom) will meet via Zoom on June 26, July 31, and Sept. 25 at 7:15-8:45 p.m. Contact Jim Kotcon (jkotcon@gmail.com or 304-594-3322) for Zoom links and program details.

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