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Bending Over Backwards for Data Centers Hits Local Opposition

Some West Virginians aren't easily pushed around, as Fundamental Data has learned. On March 18, 2025, the same day the state legislature introduced HB 2014, which prevents local people from determining what happens in their own communities, the Virginia-based company submitted an air quality permit (considered a permit to build) to the WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for a huge gas-fired power plant in Tucker County. Although much of the permit is blacked out and no purpose is given for this off-grid plant, everyone assumes that it will power a data center complex. (See MSS Summer 2025 issue.) Fundamental Data has met resistance.

WV DEP held in-person and virtual public meetings throughout last summer. The Division of Air Quality received 1,605 written comments and 18 oral comments from the public, with most of them opposed to issuing the permit. Regardless, on August 15 DEP issued the air quality permit for the gas-fired power plant and allowed the extensive redactions to remain in the permit.

On September 12, the Sierra Club, Tucker United (a grassroots group created specifically to stop the data center), and the WV Highlands Conservancy appealed the air permit. Because of HB 2014, the appeals process is the only

way to challenge the permit. The two main objections in the appeal are that the power plant is designated as a minor pollution source, thus not subject to higher regulations and testing standards, and that much of the permit has been redacted, making it impossible to determine whether it will be a minor or major source of air pollution.

The first hearing for the appeal was held on November 5 before the WV Air Quality Board at the DEP offices in Charleston. A protective order was agreed upon that allowed the three Appellates' expert witness, Dr. Ron Sahu, and their attorney Mike Becher from Appalachian Mountain Advocates to see the redacted parts of the permit.

The second appeals hearing before the AQB occurred in early December and included testimony from four community witnesses, including Jim Kotcon, who testified how this power plant would contribute haze, impacting the visibility of scenic areas and degrading the outdoor experience for Sierra Club outings. Expert witness Dr. Ron Sahu testified for almost three hours that, based on the permit information he was allowed to see, the power plant would exceed the emissions limits of a minor pollution source and thus should require continuous air monitoring. Mr. Becher filed final briefs in January, arguing that the Board should overturn the



BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON

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New News!

Newsletter changes are under consideration and we'd love your feedback. See page 14.

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Building Bridges: Partnering for Environmental and Social Justice



BY BILL PRICE
WV CHAPTER CHAIR

The challenges of climate change and environmental degradation are intrinsically linked to issues of social justice, equity, and public health. All too often, the communities that have contributed the least to these problems—low-income communities, communities of color, and Indigenous populations—bear the heaviest burden of pollution, resource depletion, and climate impacts. Addressing this requires more than just policy changes; it demands authentic, deep-rooted partnerships with these frontline communities.

For too long, environmental solutions have been top-down, planned in boardrooms or government offices without genuine input from those most affected. This approach frequently misses critical context, leads to poorly designed interventions, and further erodes trust. True progress in environmental and social justice (ESJ) necessitates a paradigm shift: The affected communities must be at the center of the decision-making process.

Frontline communities possess invaluable local knowledge—an understanding of their ecosystems, historical context, and the immediate impact of environmental harms on their daily lives. This knowledge is essential for developing solutions that are not only effective but also culturally appropriate and sustainable over the long term.

PRINCIPLES FOR AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIP

Building meaningful partnerships is not about simply informing communities; it's about sharing power and co-creating solutions. Organizations seeking to engage with ESJ issues must commit to the following principles:

Listen First, Then Act: Before proposing a project or solution, partners must invest time in deep, active listening. Understand the community's priorities, their definition of the problem, and their desired outcomes. This foundational step prevents the imposition of external agendas and ensures alignment with local needs.

Commit to Equity and Transparency: Partnerships must be structured to address historical inequities. This means providing resources, technical assistance, and capacity building that empower local organizations. All goals, decision-making processes, and resource allocations must be fully transparent to build and maintain trust.

Share Power and Leadership: True partnership requires shifting away from traditional power dynamics. Community leaders should hold positions of authority in the partnership—from planning and governance to implementation and evaluation. Their voices must be the loudest when defining success and measuring impact.

Focus on Holistic Solutions: Environmental justice is inseparable from housing, education, health, and economic opportunity. Effective partnerships tackle problems holistically, recognizing that remediating a polluted site, for example, must also include planning for local economic development and preventing displacement.

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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.

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Jim Kotcon, Conservation Chair	(*27)	304-594-3322
Betsy Lawson, Secretary	(*27)	304-983-2980
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Phoenix McDougal, Vice Chair	(*28)	

EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM

Currently Inactive.

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

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Spring in the Mountains: Renewal, Resistance, and Responsibility



BY HONEY MAY

Spring comes slowly in West Virginia. The mountains do not change all at once, but little by little the season turns, bringing longer days and greener hillsides. This time of year invites reflection, renewal, and hope. For our Sierra Club chapter, it marks an important moment to welcome new leadership, recommit to the work ahead, and look toward the future of our communities.

This season also holds special meaning within our Sierra Club community. Each year, in accordance with our chapter bylaws, members take part in electing the volunteer leaders who help guide our work and steward the organization's direction. I am honored to welcome our newly elected Executive Committee members, whose willingness to serve reflects a shared belief that West Virginia's future is worth the work, the courage, and the care it requires. Leadership rooted in love for place has always been the heart of this chapter, and I am deeply grateful to those stepping forward.

Our recent election reflects encouraging engagement from across the state, with 155 ballots returned by the January 3 deadline. Congratulations to Daria Jones, Dani Parent, and Bill Price, the top three candidates in this year's Executive Committee election. We are also grateful to every candidate who offered their service to the chapter, including Roz Eiler, Alexis Gilliland, and Godfrey Millstone. Please also join me in welcoming Carol Culvyhouse, who was also a candidate, who has been appointed to fill the unexpired term of Davis Funk.

Following the election, the Executive Committee selected its officers for the coming term. Bill Price will serve as Chapter Chair and Dani Parent as Secretary, with Chris Craig, Michael Attfield, Betsy Lawson, Alex Cole, John Harris, and Molly

Martin also taking on key leadership roles in guiding the chapter's work in the year ahead. And eternal thanks to our Treasurer, Candice Elliott, for her steady and essential service.

I also want to extend deep gratitude to outgoing Chapter Chair Jim Kotcon for his years of thoughtful leadership, wisdom, and commitment to conservation in West Virginia. Although he is stepping off the Executive Committee, we are fortunate that he will continue serving the chapter as our new Conservation Chair, where his experience and dedication will remain central to advancing much of our work.

The winter months reminded us how much meaningful work can happen even in the quietest season. Elsewhere in this newsletter, you can read about some of those efforts: quilting bees, advocacy at the Legislature, outings in some of the lands we strive to protect. Together, these moments reflect the many ways our chapter lives its values in community, in advocacy, and in shared enjoyment of the land itself.

As the new season unfolds, that spirit of connection continues. We look forward to a March online book club and a two-day opportunity for discovery and service in Mingo and McDowell Counties. We'll have more shared outdoor adventures in our spring outings. Opportunities like these allow us to learn,

reflect, and serve together while deepening our understanding of place and strengthening the community that makes this work possible. Even as we reflect on meaningful progress

Together, these moments reflect the many ways our chapter lives its values in community, in advocacy, and in shared enjoyment of the land itself.

and look ahead with hope, it is important to remember that renewal is not evenly shared. In parts of southern West Virginia, many families still live with uncertainty about something as basic and essential as clean drinking water. Access to safe water should never depend on geography, income, or political influence, yet for too many communities it remains an ongoing struggle.

Our commitment must remain steady and clear. We stand with southern West Virginia in the fight for clean, reliable drinking water. This is not only an environmental issue; it is about dignity, health, and the fundamental right to live safely in one's own home. Advocacy, partnership, and persistence will guide this work in the months ahead.

Thank you for being part of this work, for caring about clean water, wild places, and the wellbeing of our communities. Thank you for believing that renewal is still possible here.

This spring, may we move forward together with both tenderness and determination, rooted in the mountains we love and responsible for the future we are shaping side by side. 🌿

BRIDGES | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

THE PATH FORWARD

The scale of the environmental and social challenges we face requires collective action. By moving beyond traditional outreach to forge authentic, trusting partnerships with communities at the sharp end of injustice, we can unlock innovative, durable solutions. These collaborations are not just a moral imperative; they are the most effective strategy for building a truly equitable and sustainable future for everyone. Let us commit to building these bridges, ensuring that those most impacted are the ones leading the way.

Bills We Can't Afford: Utility Rate Increases and Energy Burden In WV



BY JIM KOTCON

Recent rate increases from electricity utilities have gotten the attention of WV legislators, regulators, and, especially, ratepayers. Electricity rates in West Virginia used to be among the nation's lowest but now rank near the national average. Thus, the rate of rate increases is among the fastest in the nation.

But ratepayers do not pay *rates*, we pay electric *bills*. The bill is equal to the rate times the amount of electricity used. Since West Virginia residents rank poorly in energy efficiency, our usage is well above the national average. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Agency (ElectricityPlans.com), West Virginia residential rates are the 28th highest in the nation, but our bills rank 16th.

Worse is the “energy burden.” Energy burden refers to the cost of energy as a percent of income. High electric bills and low median income means that West Virginia’s energy burden ranks among the five most expensive states in the nation.

Add in the cost of home heating, water, and other utilities, and Mountain State residents pay the highest percentage of their income for utilities among all 50 states (move.org/utility-bills-101).

WHY ARE OUR BILLS SO EXPENSIVE?

The answer is complex, but much of our electric bill is used to support the infrastructure for coal-fired power plants. Coal is no longer the lowest-cost source of electricity, but because almost 90% of West Virginia’s power generation is from coal, our costs are high. Worse, because some utilities locked themselves into expensive coal supply contracts, their power plants have been forced to burn coal even when it is not cost-competitive to do so. Appalachian Power operated their power plants even when the price of electricity was less than their cost of operation, so ApCo customers paid an additional \$81 million in 2024-25 to reimburse the utilities for these below-cost periods.

Even when the plants are not operating, the

utilities must still maintain these uneconomic plants, adding more costs to ratepayers.

Utilities also have an incentive to “pad the bills.” Utilities are guaranteed a “return on equity” for their investments. This means they have no incentive to keep costs low, and a perverse incentive to over-build. The more they spend, the more profits they make.

A great example of this is a \$2.5 billion gas-fired power plant being proposed by FirstEnergy. (MonPower and Potomac Edison are its subsidiaries.) While the companies have documented a “need” for 200 MW of new generation in the next five years, their proposed plant is sized to generate six times that (1,200 MW). Investments in energy efficiency or other means to keep rates low are nowhere to be found in their plans. The utilities make money by selling more and more electricity, not by keeping our costs low.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your legislators and demand they support policies to lower costs. Too many legislators believe that burning more coal will somehow make rates lower. Demand they support cheaper, cleaner, and faster generation sources first. Learn more at energyfreedomwv.org.

Second, send comments to the WV Public Service Commission. Demand that they oppose plans to needlessly pad infrastructure construction, and insist on energy efficiency programs, especially in FirstEnergy territory. Contact Jim Kotcon, Conservation Chair at jkotcon@gmail.com for details on how you can help keep everyone’s electricity costs low.



Turning Pollution Into an Asset: Finding Rare Earths in Acid Mine Drainage

BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON

Greenland is not the only place that has rare earth elements—there’s plenty right here in the bright orange streams that flow from West Virginia’s coal mines. In fact, extracting these essential minerals in Greenland would cost vastly more money and do more environmental damage than sifting them from our own plentiful acid mine drainage. And we’d be cleaning up our toxic streams at the same time.



Acid mine drainage from the Bucy 3 mine, west of Morgantown, empties into Dents Run. A WVDEP inspector said the AMD would need to be treated with lime forever, despite the fact that the mine has been reclaimed. Existing streams could supply AMD for mineral extraction forever. PHOTO BY BETSY LAWSON.

As previously reported (Mountain State Sierran, Fall 2023 and Summer 2024 issues) rare earth elements, critical for making the powerful yet light-weight magnets needed in modern technology, are plentiful throughout the earth’s crust, but are scattered through dense rock layers. Conventional extraction efforts involve grinding through masses of rock and disturbing undeveloped land, so roads and power sources must also be built to mine for them. The ore grinding and chemical leaching in rare earth mining is also highly water-intensive.

Acid mine drainage (AMD) resulting from coal mining occurs when pyrite and other by-products are exposed to air and water, forming

sulfuric acid. The acid leaches metal particles, including rare earth elements, out of the rock. So, the costly rock-grinding involved in rare earth mining is done for free. The more acidic the AMD, the more enriched it is with rare earth elements. To retrieve the valuable elements, the AMD is placed in densely woven bags, letting the purified water seep out, leaving a dense sludge. Settling ponds are also used to separate the water from the solids. Then, using technology developed by the WVU Water Research Institute, the rare earths are removed from the condensed sludge using solvents. Finally, the concentrate must be further refined into the separate elements to be ready for commercial use.

With funding from the EPA and the U.S. Departments of Energy and Defense, several sites have been developed in Monongalia, Tucker, Grant, and Clay counties to recover rare earth elements (REEs). Decker’s Creek, heavily polluted as a result of AMD from the Richard Mine, is one stream getting cleaned up as sludge is collected and condensed. And a facility west of the Mt. Storm Coal Fired Power Plant has deployed a full-scale AMD treatment plant. It processes 800 gallons per minute while producing 1% REE pre-concentrate.

What began as an idea in 2015 at the WVU Water Research Institute under Dr. Paul Ziemkiewicz is closer now to a commercial operation. In November 2025, the U.S. Department of Energy awarded \$5 million to advance the research toward commercialization. Following the grant announcement, Ziemkiewicz said, “This new, three-year project will take us the next step toward commercialization by designing and building a process train that will refine our pre-concentrate into a mixed rare earth oxide with an REE grade exceeding 90%. We will then design and operate a process for separating the mixed rare earth oxides into individually separated products ready for the market. At that point, we will have a technology package that can be commercially developed.”

In 2022, the WV Legislature passed HB 4003, which allows the people who recover rare earth elements from AMD to keep the profits.

In December 2025, the WVU Board of Governors endorsed the University’s creation of Mission Critical Materials LLC, a for-profit company that allows the University to partner with investors to build a U.S. supply chain for REEs. Mission Critical Materials aims to establish a complete mine-to-magnet pipeline, reducing reliance on foreign sources for vital defense and clean energy technologies. How often do environmentalists, the U.S. Department of Defense, and Big Tech all get to celebrate the same outcome? And it all started in West Virginia!

Opposing Corridor H Wardensville – Next Steps?

The fight against the costly, unneeded, and destructive seven-mile expansion of the Corridor H highway between Wardensville, WV, and the Virginia state line continues, with opponents considering their next legal step. Legal action would need to begin before the WV Division of Highways (WVDOH) March 10 construction bid deadline.



BY BONNIE MCKEOWN
STEWARDS OF THE
POTOMAC HIGHLANDS



The present Corridor H near Wardensville, WV.
PHOTO BY LOKI KERN.

For over 30 years, Virginia has shown no interest in building the 15 miles east from its state line to I-81 and I-66 at Strasburg, which was plotted on planning maps in the early 1990s but never actually built. So, many question why \$500 million in federal tax dollars should be spent on a four-lane expansion through Wardensville and the George Washington Forest, only to end at the state line.

Much of the 100-mile Corridor H, starting at I-79 west of Elkins, has been built, but it is only lightly traveled. Among proposed expansions, those around Wardensville and another section near Blackwater Canyon in Tucker County are the most environmentally sensitive.

A lawsuit settlement in 2000 divided Corridor H into separate projects, each of which can be challenged separately. Groups that signed on to this original lawsuit, including the

Sierra Club, are prohibited in the settlement agreement from being plaintiffs in current legal action. But the Sierra Club is permitted to help opponents of other sections to raise money and publicize the issue.

The Wardensville section of Corridor H would threaten the town's aquifer, steer tourist traffic away from the town's downtown business district, construct heavy bridges over delicate trout streams, cross the Tuscarora Trail, and run through the National Forest. Species of concern in the path of Corridor H include the northern long-eared bat and the wood turtle. The ridgetop of Great North Mountain is the state line. It is a key bird migration corridor and a sensitive area for water due to its karst and sandstone geological composition.

Nevertheless, WVDOH determined the highway would have "no significant impact"

on the area in its November 2025 study. State and federal agencies insist their proposed four-lane road has a legitimate "purpose and need" and that any environmental damages can be mitigated. Local supporters of Corridor H cite safety concerns on the existing two-lane road. WV Governor Richard Morrissey and both U.S. Senators from the state support the expansion.

Corridor H opponents, led by Stewards of the Potomac Highlands, believe highway support is built on an outdated concept that new roads through rural areas stimulate the local economy. They have submitted public comments to challenge the state's Finding of No Significant Impact, and they advocate a less-expensive alternative: spot traffic flow and safety improvements to the present road, such as uphill passing lanes and left turn lanes. Similar improvements have had success on two-lane Route 50 east of Romney, a more heavily traveled road.

Recently weakened federal regulations impede the legal case against Corridor H. Nevertheless, Stewards of the Potomac Highlands and its allies are searching for ways to fight costly new projects and instead address the long-neglected maintenance of West Virginia's roads and bridges. A 2024 survey by a nonprofit organization showed that nearly 20% of West Virginia's bridges are structurally deficient ([tinyurl.com/wv-bridges](https://www.tinyurl.com/wv-bridges).) To get involved or to contribute funds for this cause, contact Bonni McKeown of Stewards of the Potomac Highlands, barrelhbonni@yahoo.com.

Fast, Focused, and High-Stakes for Water and Communities

West Virginia's regular legislative session runs for 60 days, from January 14 to March 14. Traditionally, the first few weeks allow legislators, staff, and advocates to find their footing, but not this year. Committees met early, bills moved quickly, and environmental advocates found themselves running between the House and Senate from the start. Even though we're only a third of the way through the session (as of this writing), we're already tracking well over 100 bills.



BY ANNA SAAB

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR,
WV ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

Although early conversations at the Capitol centered on political alignment and priorities—who stands with the governor and whether the Senate will focus on divisive social issues—there has been lively discussion about the issues West Virginians care about most. Issues like clean water, flood resiliency, infrastructure, and community safety have already received a lot of attention during this session.

FLOOD RESILIENCY AND RECOVERY

Flood resiliency has taken center stage with the introduction of SB390 and HB4018. These bills would allow the State Resiliency Officer to disburse money from the Flood Resiliency Trust Fund for the Governor's \$10 million early warning system (SENTRY). Low-income communities would be prioritized, but other geographic areas could also receive funding for flood mitigation projects under the proposed legislation.

Flooding and flood recovery are an unavoidable reality in West Virginia, with two devastating flood events in the past year alone. We're pressing lawmakers to invest in long-term flood protection and preparedness. However, lawmakers have told us that any budget funding outside of the SENTRY program—a pilot project that uses AI to provide earlier flood warnings—would likely be vetoed. While SENTRY may be useful, it's not a substitute for comprehensive flood-resiliency planning, especially as the Flood Resiliency Fund remains unfunded.

DRINKING WATER SAFETY

One of the most concerning developments is the renewed effort to weaken aboveground storage tank protections. Since the 2014 chemical spill that contaminated drinking water in the Kanawha Valley, industry has steadily worked to roll back inspection requirements in zones of critical concern. SB641 is an example of this. At a time when residents in Wayne and Wyoming counties are experiencing active water crises, proposals



that reduce oversight of chemical storage near drinking water sources raise serious concerns. West Virginians know all too well what happens when prevention is treated as optional.

The conversations underway matter, but so do the choices ahead. Protecting West Virginians must remain the Legislature's highest priority.

DATA CENTER DEVELOPMENT

Data center development is also dominating legislative discussion. Many policymakers believe West Virginia risks missing out on economic opportunities from data center development. Others urge caution, pointing to hard lessons from the past. Last year's HB2014 incentivized data centers but didn't contain adequate safeguards or allow opportunities for local input. The legislation, coupled with a proposed data center, caused massive

public outcry in Tucker County. Some of the legislators who support data center development now widely agree that if data centers come to West Virginia, they must do so responsibly.

We at WVEC are working hard to address gaps in data center policy. Current policy is marred by a lack of local control and oversight, uneven distribution of property tax revenue, insufficient evaluation and monitoring of land, water, and energy usage, and little-to-no transparency and public participation throughout the development process. We have provided delegates with amendments to consider as the Department of Commerce rule governing certified microgrids and data centers moves to the House floor in early February. We are also working with Senators who are interested in strengthening existing law and with Governor Morrisey's staff on administrative fixes that could improve oversight without legislative action. While outcomes remain uncertain, the growing focus on water use and local decision making is a meaningful step forward.

Still, legislation like HB4013 threatens lost revenue for communities in the vicinity of data center development. The bill would provide a steep tax incentive for data center developers, potentially losing millions in tax revenue across the state. Thanks to strong public engagement and timely comments from allied groups, the bill has been temporarily removed from the House Finance Committee agenda while discussions continue.

West Virginia's Water Crisis: A Decades-Old Public Health Emergency



BY BRAD DAVIS

In February 2023, Wyoming County residents began experiencing water quality issues in communities situated along Indian Creek, bringing far-reaching attention to a decades-old public health emergency in southern West Virginia and moving people from all corners of the state to action.

“From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice” is a faith-based community organizing and advocacy group based in McDowell County. It has worked with many other state and regional organizations and individuals to support impacted communities and find long-term solutions to this multi-pronged water crisis.

For the past two years, the group and its partners have provided direct service to impacted residents—receiving and distributing bottled water donations, testing well water with the assistance of Virginia Tech, and, with support from the WV United Methodist Disaster Response Team, deploying two 500-gallon water buffaloes (trailers for potable water transport) in Mingo and Wyoming Counties. Additionally, the group has worked to empower locals to advocate for themselves and pressure public officials to find funding solutions to end the crisis.

A NEVER-ENDING CRISIS

With the ongoing decline of the coal industry that long provided the sole economic base for southern coalfield counties and municipalities, the region no longer has the capacity nor the resources to adequately provide proper maintenance or needed upgrades to existing water systems. Additionally, many families who use wells, including those along Indian Creek and in the McDowell County community of

Leckie, have had their water contaminated by irresponsible industrial practices, such as leaks from coal refuse injection sites, mountaintop removal, acid mine drainage, and gas well drilling.

Southern coalfield residents routinely deal with orange, yellow, brown, and sometimes even black tap water, oftentimes containing thick, filmy goop and sediment. This makes



A water source along U.S. Route 119 near the Logan-Mingo County line, one of the many “roadside springs” impacted southern coalfield residents rely on for their water. PHOTO BY REV. CAITLIN WARE.

everyday tasks nearly impossible. Doing laundry can ruin clothes. Showering can lead to skin rashes or burns. Household plumbing fixtures and water filters have been ruined. Both cooking and cleaning are a hardship. And drinking the water is out of the question—for both people and pets.

Many residents spend over \$100 a month on bottled water and well water treatment. Of course, there are public health and safety issues—increased illness levels and sometimes the loss of rural fire protection services for entire communities.

In McDowell County, the water sources for

both Anawalt’s public water system and Gary’s municipal system are mined-out, flooded coal seams. The Gary system has been ruled a distressed utility by the Public Service Commission. Residents are paying as much as \$180 per month for water they cannot use. Anawalt customers deal with similar issues, including service disruptions due to line breaks, which can happen multiple times each month. Both communities have had approved and prioritized projects on the state’s Drinking Water Intended Use Plan awaiting construction for years, but neither can begin work due to the inability to secure the millions of dollars needed.

The process to obtain funding is stacked against such communities. Many simply don’t have the human resources to apply for state/federal grants or loans. Matching funds are often required—funds impoverished counties and municipalities don’t have. This leaves small, rural, resource-strapped communities with no other choice but to implement rate hikes for customers already paying for unsafe and unreliable water. Residents of the poorest region of West Virginia simply cannot afford these rate hikes.

THE HOPE FOR A FIX

The consensus among government agencies, organizations, and residents is that this public health emergency can only be rectified by funding new water infrastructure projects or massive upgrades to existing ones. Pressure must be applied to ensure these projects are carried out, and safe water must be provided for residents until projects are completed.

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Southern West Virginia Historical Outing and Cleanup



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

Southern West Virginia faces many challenges, from polluted water to lack of economic opportunity. A two-day event in April will offer Sierrans and others a chance to learn about West Virginia’s southern region and to meet with local folks and lend a hand in an area cleanup.

On Friday, April 17, this Sierra Club outing will include a 1 p.m. guided tour of the Mine Wars Museum in Matewan, Mingo County, followed by a short hike through the town and across the Tug Fork River into Kentucky. Along the way, we’ll visit the Hatfield McCoy Historic Marker in McCarr and Sid Hatfield’s grave in Buskirk. Hatfield, a relative of the infamous “Devil Anse” Hatfield, was an active supporter of the United Mine Workers of America and was targeted for retribution by the coal industry. We’ll also learn some of the area’s history beyond the Hatfield and McCoy feud.

On Friday evening, participants will explore Welch and visit the McDowell County Courthouse, where Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were gunned down in 1921 by Baldwin-Felts detectives. Afterwards, there will be a meal in Welch with members and leaders of Reconnecting McDowell, a local organization that works on revitalizing and supporting the county.

Saturday, April 18 will offer an opportunity to join Reconnecting McDowell, Trout Unlimited, and other local groups for a road cleanup of Route 52 or a cleanup of Elkhorn Creek. (Waders required for the latter.)

You are welcome to join part or all of this two-day event. Overnight lodging or camping can be arranged on your own. For information on that or any of the events, contact Lisa DiBartolomeo at lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org. To register for the Friday tour or hike, go to sierraclub.org/west-virginia/events and click the April 17 outing on the calendar.

ABOVE: Members of Trout Unlimited’s southern WV chapter and volunteers from Make It Shine McDowell gather in Welch’s Keystone City Park after an April 2024 cleanup. PHOTO BY MARK KEMP.

WATER | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

With this in mind, From Below worked with state elected officials on both sides of the aisle to push for a bipartisan emergency funding bill in the present legislative session. The Coalfield Clean Water Act would appropriate \$250 million from the state’s \$1.4 billion Revenue Shortfall, or “Rainy Day” Fund, allocating it equitably to the nine southern coalfield counties. Approved, prioritized, shovel-ready but unfunded projects in those

counties would receive the money. Though it would not completely fix the crises, \$250 million would be a huge step toward that goal. At the time of this report, the bill has yet to be introduced in the House of Delegates. It will likely face an uphill climb when it is, because currently there is little political will to tap the Rainy Day Fund.

Meanwhile, the residents of southern West Virginia continue dealing with this decades-

long crisis. They live each day in the midst of a public health emergency as if it is a normal part of existence. They continue to get sick. They continue to die. And they continue asking why?

Rev. Brad Davis is a United Methodist Pastor in McDowell County and co-director of From Below: Rising Together for Coalfield Justice.

Plug-In Solar: The New Kid on the Block



BY CORY CHASE

WV PROGRAM ASSOCIATE,
SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS

Imagine visiting your local hardware store, and next to the toaster ovens, blenders, and televisions is an aisle for solar power, filled with “plug and play” portable solar panels. You pick out a system to fit your needs, and once home, you install the panel outside your window and plug it in a wall outlet. Done! It’s a sunny day, and the panel instantly starts generating electricity for your home. No paperwork, permitting, or interconnection fees—just clean, affordable power.

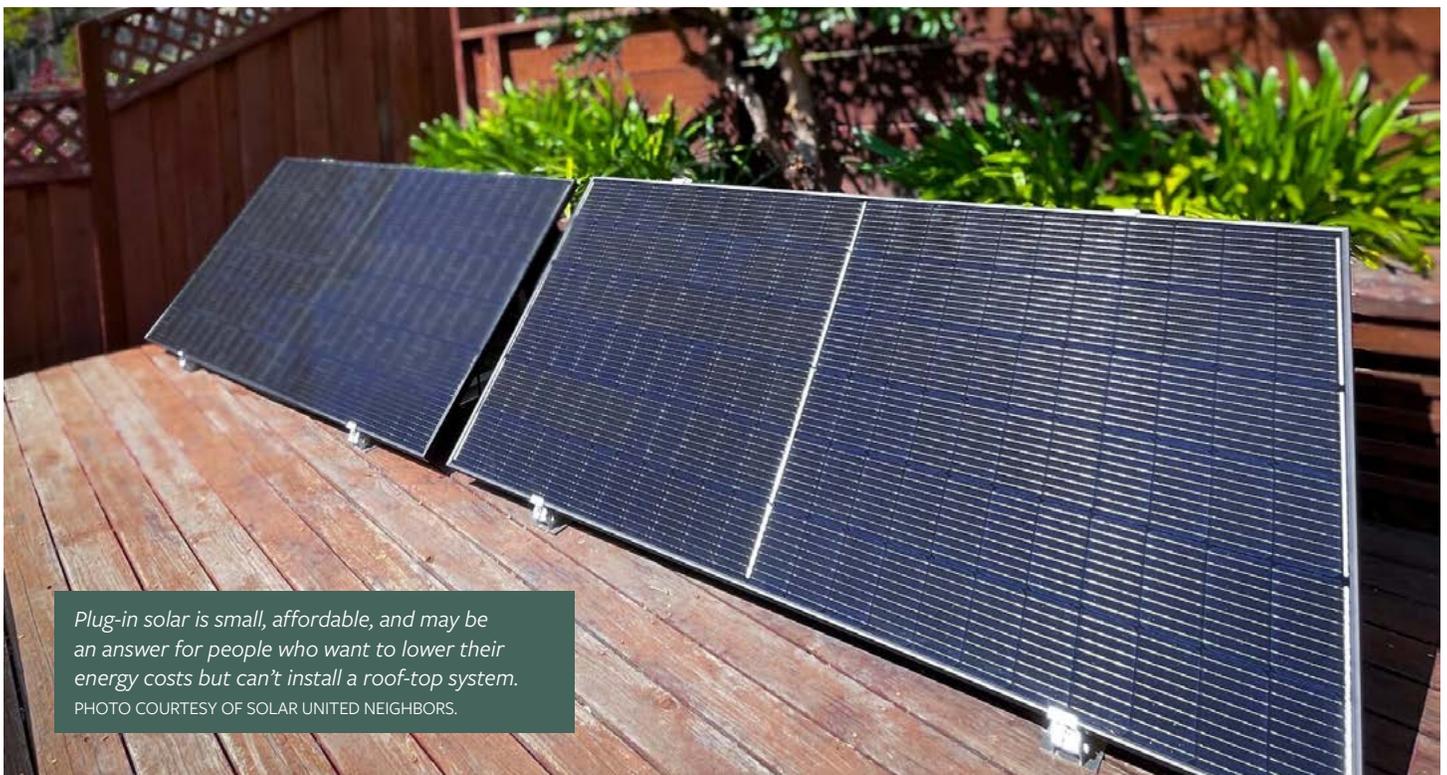
This kind of solar power—known as “plug-in solar” or “balcony solar”—could be the next big step for solar access in the United States. Plug-in solar panels are small, affordable systems. They can generate up to 1,200 Watts, enough to power a large refrigerator, and cost between \$400–\$2,000. Smaller systems can be plugged into a wall outlet. As electricity prices skyrocket nationwide, these solar panels are an easy way for families to lower their energy bills and take charge of their energy.

IS IT SAFE? Plug-in solar is as safe as a hair dryer. Following Utah’s model legislation, the systems are required to comply with Underwriters Laboratories (U.L.) national electric code certification, the standard for nearly all U.S. electrical devices. U.L. is expected to release the final standards for plug-in solar systems in 2026. The panels have a built-in microinverter that shuts the solar system down within milliseconds when there are grid outages. This protects line workers and eliminates the risk of electric shock during plug-ins and unplugging. As with any electrical device, users must observe common-sense guidelines, like not bypassing circuit breakers or not plugging in too many appliances into the same circuit.

But here in WV, we can’t get these panels until our legislature passes enabling legislation. While this is a high priority for us here at the nonprofit Solar United Neighbors (SUN), we still expect this to be a difficult law to pass in a state that is backsliding even worse into fossil fuel reliance. Despite the challenges, plug-in solar is a hard issue to ignore, since it requires no government subsidy or tax dollars to enable. Learn more at solarunitedneighbors.org/plug-in.

**Despite the challenges,
plug-in solar is a hard issue
to ignore, since it requires
no government subsidy or
tax dollars to enable.**

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 15](#)



Plug-in solar is small, affordable, and may be an answer for people who want to lower their energy costs but can't install a roof-top system.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SOLAR UNITED NEIGHBORS.

Living Off the Grid: A Lifetime Journey to Adopt Solar Energy



BY JENNY THACKER



Roof and solar panel installation work underway on Jenny Thacker's home in 2023. It was a big job that led to big savings and satisfaction.
PHOTO BY JENNY THACKER.

Back in the 1980s my mother moved our family to the coastal mountains of northern California—a place that was very much off the grid. Homes were few and far between, with minimum lot sizes of 20 acres. The clay roads were rugged—undrivable for weeks at a time if there was rain or snow—and no one had electricity or running water. Water especially was a challenge, with many homeowners unable to dig productive wells. My family would drive into town and fill five-gallon buckets at the park drinking fountain to use at home. Eventually, we were able to clean out a cistern and have water trucked in for our toilets and shower. We bought drinking water from a neighbor's spring.

Electricity was another difficulty. Everyone had different solutions—tiny windmills or mini water wheels that worked in ephemeral streams but were useless in the dry summers. My family chose solar panels that were mounted on a rack installed on a nearby hillside. The panels could charge a half dozen 12-volt batteries under the house. A manual inverter, which had to be carefully watched, would convert the 12-volt DC power to work on our 110-volt AC appliances and lights. When there wasn't enough power in the batteries, we would manually switch to a gas generator.

All this was backed up by wood stoves for heat, a 1950s-era kerosene refrigerator, and lots of kerosene lamps.

INSTALLING SOLAR PANELS IN WV: CHALLENGES, COMPLICATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES

Not surprisingly, when I contemplated putting solar panels on my roof in West Virginia a few years ago, my expectations didn't exactly match modern reality.

After my first encounter with solar contractors at a West Virginia Earth Day celebration, I

found my rooftop didn't have enough sun exposure to power modern electrical needs.

Later, after the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act made installing solar panels much cheaper, I tried again. A different company wanted to replace my roof and cover the surface with panels to eliminate high electric bills. I could not afford it. However, my kids had moved out, and I no longer needed to heat my barn, so we could go with 30% fewer panels. This made the price reasonable.

There were many complications in the

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 12](#)

ExCom Election Results



BY CANDICE ELLIOTT

The Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter is managed by a dedicated group of volunteers, democratically elected each year to an Executive Committee (ExCom). Candidates who win open seats serve willingly and with dedication. All who place their names on the ballot serve the ideals of Sierra Club and offer members a choice. Often, those not elected to the main governing body find other ways to contribute to the advancement of our Chapter and its groups. Here are the results of the most recent elections in the WV Chapter:

WEST VIRGINIA CHAPTER ELECTION

The WV Chapter mailed 1,560 Chapter ExCom ballots in early December 2025 to all members with active memberships at that time. By the return deadline of Jan 3, we had received 155 completed ballots that were tabulated on January 4 by a four-person elections committee. An additional ten ballots postmarked by January 3 came in later and were tallied separately. All told, the return rate of 10 percent was considered a healthy response.

From the seven candidates on the ballot, the top three vote-getters were, in order, Daria Jones, Dani Parent and Bill Price, who were each appointed to two-year terms ending in January 2028. A vacant spot on the ExCom was filled by appointing Carol Culvyhouse, the fourth vote-getter, to an unexpired term ending in January 2027.

At the January 10 Chapter ExCom meeting in Morgantown, Bill Price was chosen as the new Chapter Chair, replacing outgoing Chair, Jim Kotcon, who was ineligible to serve on the ExCom after reaching his

term limit. Additional open positions were filled by enthusiastic volunteers and appointees. The resulting list of officers and committee chairs may be found in the Chapter Directory on p. 2.

MONONGAHELA GROUP ELECTION

At the end of December, the Mon Group mailed out 318 ballots, 41 of which were returned in time to count votes, representing a nearly 13 percent return rate. A four-person election team tabulated the votes on February 6. In one of the closest contests ever seen in our Chapter's history, the result was a virtual four-way tie. Adrienne Epley Brown received one more vote than each of the other three; Mike Attfield and Susan Hunter voluntarily ceded their positions in favor of giving new (younger) candidate Phoenix McDougal a seat at the table. Mike and Susan intend to stay involved with the Sierra Club on other committees. There is more than enough work for everyone to contribute their gifts and skills.

LIVING OFF THE GRID | [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11](#)

installation process—some due to the Maryland solar contractor's lack of experience with West Virginia bureaucracy. Then the power company wanted me to pay for modernization of the decades-old neighborhood transformer a block away from my house. Then, because West Virginia doesn't pay for solar credits, we had to strike a deal to sell my solar credits to Ohio.

It took until February 2024 to get panels on my new roof, and another three months before I was able to get the power company to install special meters to count how much power I generated and how much power I used. This was needed because without batteries or a generator, any excess power that I generated would be sent back to the grid for others to use.

Meanwhile, if my solar panels were covered in snow, I would get electricity from the power company. All this would happen automatically.

No manual checks of the inverter. No starting the generator. No worrying about aging batteries. Actually, no active effort on my part at all.

LIVING WITH SOLAR

My solar-powered house works like any house that's on the grid. I use power when I need it and lose it when a tree falls on the power lines (as occasionally happens around here). I have a brand-new roof that should last 50 years and solar panels that will outlast the 20 years I have to pay for them. During most of the year, my electric bills are \$6 per month (for the power company's administrative costs). I regularly get back between \$25 to \$250 for my solar credits, depending on how much the sun shines. These credits pay for most of my energy use in the winter, when there is less sunlight and I use more electricity than I generate. When those credits are spent, I pay regular rates. Last year, those uncovered

bills amounted to \$300 for the entire winter. That compares with the monthly \$700 bills I'd have prior to my solar installation.

It took about 18 months to put solar panels on my house—a very long slog with many troubles along the way. But financially, it was well worth it. My monthly payments for my new roof and solar panels are far below what I used to pay for electricity alone. The solar company says this system increases the value of the house by about \$100,000.

Emotionally, it has also been worthwhile. I didn't get a battery pack that would allow me to have power when the grid goes down, but I also don't have the hassles of tending a battery or generator. I know that my costs will be stable over the coming decades when fossil energy prices fluctuate. And best of all, I have the peace of mind of knowing that I am doing the best I can to protect the environment. 🌱

Executive Committee Member Carol Culvyhouse

BY CAROL CULVYHOUSE



I live in the Eastern Panhandle and am excited to serve on the Executive Committee. I got involved with the Sierra Club by participating in hikes and other outings. Along with hiking, I enjoy bicycling, cross country skiing, and observing birds. When not doing all those things, I can be found working in my gardens or immersed in one of my several indoor hobbies.

I believe in giving back, so in the past year I've participated in two Club service outings—rebuilding trails in the Allegheny National Forest and the Arapahoe and Roosevelt National Forest. On both of those trips, I've met people who share the love of the forest and who care about our natural environment.

WV Chapter ExCom Welcomes Daria Jones

BY DARIA JONES

I grew up in Levittown, PA, a planned suburb bordering woodlands and wetlands adjacent to the gorgeous Delaware River. There I learned to love hiking, canoeing, rock climbing and foraging for mushrooms and berries. In 1973, I moved to a 400-acre farm in Western Pennsylvania. My love for this rural countryside was tempered by the industrial degradation and maltreatment of the land and its inhabitants by the coal industry. I became knowledgeable about soil and water conservation and land subsidence. For 50 years, I've advocated and fought for coalfield justice. Along with others from the Association of Rural Conservation, we halted dam construction by U.S. Steel in Western PA. As a member of Protect Our Water and Environmental Rights, I helped pass PA's Act 54, which remunerated citizens adversely affected by longwall coal mining. I served on boards for Habitat for Humanity in both Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

After returning to studies at WVU, my career took many directions—teaching, serving as director for a rehabilitation service organization, and lobbying for a non-profit agency. After 15 years in private practice as a neuromuscular therapist, I became a certified specialist in the traumatic brain injury program at WVU, work that included lobbying in the state legislature and planning conferences.

Having lost our Pennsylvania home to longwall coal-mining subsidence, we moved to Morgantown in 2000. Here I became a Sierra Club member, with special interests in the Beyond Coal Movement and keeping water clean and safe. I'm against improper and excessive placement of data-mining centers. Land conservation is important to me, and I am a supporting member of the WV Land Trust, Friends of the Cheat, and the WV Highlands Conservancy. As an avid mountaineer, cyclist, and cross-country skier, I care deeply about protecting our environment and green spaces. My work with the WV Chapter will be supporting public lands, conservation, and serving on the political committee.





Newsletter Changes Being Considered – Your Feedback is Welcome

The West Virginia Chapter is considering new options in our communications outreach to members and others. One possibility is changing the format and distribution of the Mountain State Sierran to an all-digital publication that is interactive with our website. Like many organizations, we are looking at readership numbers, need for print or digital format, expense, outreach to the general public, and appeal for involvement.

We would love to hear from you, our readers. How long have you read the Mountain State Sierran? Do you read it online or in print, and why? Would you prefer a shorter publication that is more frequent? Can you think of changes to our newsletter that would increase your interest and involvement with the Chapter? How do you presently interact electronically with the chapter—through emails? Social media?

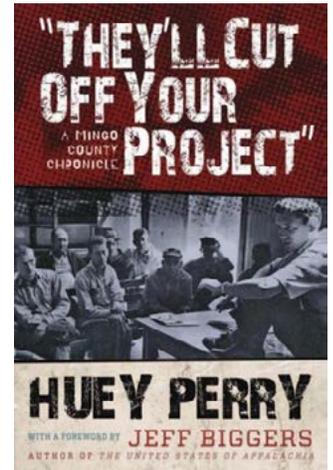
Please send your ideas and suggestions to Chris Craig (ccraig@laurellodge.com) or by mail to PO Box 1011, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.

Thank you for your feedback, your membership, and your support!

WV Activist and Author Huey Perry to Offer Webinar Talk

Legendary author and activist Huey Perry, a veteran of President Johnson’s War on Poverty in the 1960s, will offer a talk on his book *They’ll Cut Off Your Project* and his experiences organizing folks in Mingo County to oppose exploitation and corruption, on Monday, March 2, from 6:30-8 p.m. His work can inspire us all to organize our communities to support our neighbors, whether by supporting electricity affordability or fighting climate change.

We recommend you get his book from your local library, bookstore, or Bookshop.org and read it to prepare for the webinar. After the webinar, we’ll offer a follow-up where we’ll talk about what Mr. Perry has inspired you to do in your neighborhood and what you pledge to work on to become more actively involved in your community and in the work of the Sierra Club. Watch for emails from us with links and more details. Contact lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org for more information.



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

Quilting for Community

BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

Building on an Appalachian cultural tradition, my friend CJ Helenski and I started a project to bring our community out during the cold, dark, winter nights here in Morgantown.

Beginning with a fantastic first event in early January, 56 people (!) joined us as we began the project by watching a Ted Talk by Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson (tinyurl.com/talks-with-ayana) about finding joy in fighting climate change. We then brainstormed ways each of us could take our skills and interests and put them to work in the climate fight. (Thanks go out to Lisa Giuliani at The Co-Op on Pleasant Street for hosting this event.)

Since that initial night, we have met at the Retail Lab on High Street to begin choosing fabric and sewing our quilt. I didn’t think I could sew, but the Retail Lab taught us how to use their industrial machines, and it was really fun. Each week, despite weather challenges, folks have come out to join us, to learn about quilting and sewing, and to meet new people and learn how we can make a difference in climate change, including through the Beyond Coal Campaign. These days, everyone appreciates the chance to come together for good.

Our hope is to finish our Log Cabin quilt by Earth Day (April 22), and display it around the state to spark conversations about environmental advocacy. If you have ideas about where we could display the quilt near you, or if you’d like to help start a quilting effort in your community, please contact me (lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org). Let’s cover our state in beautiful quilts to demonstrate that the Sierra Club is part of our communities and show that West Virginians are ready to move beyond coal to a clean-energy future.



Quilting and community brought about a unique way for Sierrans to fight climate change in Morgantown this past winter.
PHOTO BY HONEY MAY.

Students' Charity Concert Raises Awareness for Environmental Advocacy



Sorry Face was one of the bands featured at SSC's Benefit Concert at 123 Pleasant Street, Morgantown, in January. PHOTO BY GREYSON POOL.

On January 23, WVU's Sierra Student Coalition (SSC) hosted Sierra Swing, a charity concert that raised awareness and funds for environmental advocacy. The concert's venue was 123 Pleasant Street, a local bar and community gathering space in Morgantown that features live music. The lineup of musicians featured folk and alternative artists, primarily from the Morgantown and Pittsburgh areas, including Matt the Banjo Guy, Sorry Face, Secret Tunnel, Tommy Thompson, Escape Plan 79, Matthew Bellsario, and Gravel. All musicians and the venue donated their services, so all proceeds benefitted the cause.

The total \$550 raised during the event was donated to Tucker United, a group opposing the building of a combined data center and powerplant in Tucker County. Both SSC and the Sierra Club WV Chapter also tabled at the event to spread awareness, collect additional donations for the cause, and offer other ways to get involved.

A sign-up sheet was available at the concert for anyone interested in attending the West Virginia Environmental Council's E-Day at the Capitol on February 23. This event will take place at the State Capitol in Charleston and will involve direct, in-person, environmental advocacy. The Sierra Club and other organizations will table at the event, and attendees will meet directly with legislators to advocate for the expansion of clean energy in the state and oppose the increased use of coal and non-renewables.

In preparation for E-Day, the Sierra Club will be hosting a training session focused on legislation and lobbying. It will be conducted by Mike Jones and Olivia Miller on Tuesday, February 10. This will give students insight into the lobbying and legislative process, allowing them to better advocate for environmental policy issues at the Capitol.

For more information on SSC and their activities, visit tinyurl.com/wvu-ssc.



BY GREYSON POOL
SSC MEMBER

PLUG-IN SOLAR
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

DON'T WANT TO WAIT ON THE WV LEGISLATURE? NEITHER DO WE.

The Sierra Club has teamed up with SUN to bring you the WV Eastern Panhandle 2026 Solar/Storage/EV Charger Co-op!

The co-op is open to homeowners in Berkeley, Morgan, and Jefferson counties. The last day to sign up is May 22, 2026.

You can get free technical assistance and savings. SUN will review your property to see if it's suitable for solar panels. You'll learn all about solar technology, financing, and what savings to expect on your electric bill.

After a competitive bidding process facilitated by SUN, which remains vendor-neutral, co-op members will select a single solar company to complete the installations. Joining the co-op does not obligate members to purchase solar. Instead, members will have the option to individually purchase panels based on the installer's group rate. And there's a bonus: The co-op isn't just for solar panels—it includes an option to get battery storage and an EV charger, too! When paired with solar panels, battery storage will keep the lights on during severe weather events. If you have an electric vehicle—or are thinking of buying one—charging it with solar energy makes it even greener and more affordable. SUN will host several free information sessions to educate community members about solar energy and the co-op. Individuals interested in going solar can sign up for the co-op or one of the upcoming information sessions on the co-op web page.

Visit the co-op website to sign up: solarunitedneighbors.org/wvpanhandle.

Outings

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



DAY HIKE

Saturday, February 21, 2026

**Yankauer Nature Preserve,
Berkeley County, WV**

The Yankauer Nature Preserve is owned and managed by Potomac Valley Audubon Society on 104 acres of historic farmland along the Potomac River that is now forested. It provides habitat for birds and other wildlife and is famed for its spring wildflowers. We will hike its easy trails on rolling terrain in winter, on a loop along the perimeter of the preserve. The hike is appropriate for anyone able to complete a short winter walk on unpaved trails. Dogs are not allowed in the preserve. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 2 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 1.5 hours

Leader: Ken Kendall
kekendall65@gmail.com
304-433-9537

DAY HIKE

Saturday, March 7, 2026

**Paw Paw Tunnel, C&O Canal National
Historical Park**

The Paw Paw Tunnel was a 19th-century engineering wonder, taking C&O Canal barges through a rugged mountain and avoiding miles of the Paw Paw Bends along the Potomac River. We will hike on the C&O Canal towpath through the Paw Paw Tunnel to the Sorel Ridge Hiker/Biker Campground. We will then return by going over the Tunnel Hill Trail, enjoying some good views of the Potomac River.

Distance: 4 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

Leader: Ken Kendall
kekendall65@gmail.com
304-433-9537

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, March 29, 2026

**C&O Canal towpath, Brunswick, MD to
Harpers Ferry, WV**

This is the first of a series of leisurely Sunday rides throughout spring. We will view nature and learn about some history along the canal. We will keep an easy pace and enjoy views of the Potomac River along the way.

Distance: 11 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

Leader: Tammy Vincent
tammy.vincent.id@gmail.com
208-866-8422

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, April 5, 2026

**Bike Ride: C&O Canal towpath, Mountain
Lock to Harpers Ferry, WV**

See March 29

Distance: 9 miles

Difficulty: EASY

DAY HIKE

Saturday, March 21, 2026

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 Lehigh. 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. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 12 miles

Difficulty: DIFFICULT

Duration: 7 hours, including carpool

Leader: Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260



A pre-Thanksgiving chill and early rain didn't stop these Sierrans from exploring a lovely area of Pennsylvania on the Appalachian and other trails in Caledonia State Park.

PHOTO BY ED WHEELLESS.



Leftover ice and snow from the storm of late January didn't allow for the planned hike on the Appalachian Trail. But these Sierrans made the best of it with a hike through Harpers Ferry and along the nearby C&O Canal towpath. They're shown here at the Hilltop House Hotel overlook, Harpers Ferry. PHOTO BY JEANANNE SHULTZ.

DAY HIKE
Saturday, April 11, 2026

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Harpers Ferry, WV

We will meet at the park visitor center and hike to the lower town, visiting the Shenandoah Canal and the remains of the old water power industry on Virginius Island along the way. Once in lower town, we will gather at one of the town restaurants for some refreshment or a light lunch before returning on a more rigorous walk to Jefferson Rock and along the Appalachian Trail. Those wanting only the easy half of the hike can ride the park shuttle back. On both walks we'll share a bit of history and get some nice views of the Shenandoah River and the area. Note that admission to Harpers Ferry NHP requires \$20/car or park passes. Carpooling may be arranged to reduce that cost.

- Distance:** 4.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE with 2-mile option
- Duration:** 3.5 hours
- Leader:** Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260

DAY HIKE AND MUSEUM TOUR
Friday, April 17, 2026

Guided Tour of the Mine Wars Museum and Two-State Walk of Matewan, WV and area

We will start with a guided tour of the Mine Wars Museum in Matewan, WV. Afterwards, we will stroll around the town of Matewan before crossing the Tug Fork River into Kentucky, where we'll visit Sid Hatfield's grave in Buskirk and the Hatfield-McCoy historical marker in McCarr. We will follow up with optional sightseeing and dinner in Welch, WV with members of the local community. For more information, see related article, p. 9.

- Distance:** 1.4 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY
- Duration:** 3 hours
- Leader:** Lisa DiBartolomeo
lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org



In December, a large group showed up at Cool Springs Battlefield, near Berryville, VA, to learn a little Civil War history, enjoy scenic views of the Shenandoah River, and walk off a bit of Christmas dinner. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT

BIKE RIDE
Sunday, April 19, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Shepherdstown, WV to Mountain Lock

- See March 29**
- Distance:** 11 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY

DAY HIKE
Saturday, May 2, 2026

Trillium walk, Thompson Wildlife Management Area, Shenandoah Farms, VA

This is a leisurely stroll in the Thompson WMA, taking in the beauty of trilliums in bloom. It is the largest plant community of this kind in Virginia, and possibly in the U.S. The hike will be limited to twelve persons, due to the area's restrictions. Note that the date of this hike is subject to change, as needed by time of full bloom. Preregister to receive updates.

- Distance:** TBD
- Difficulty:** EASY
- Duration:** 3 hours
- Leader:** Tammy Vincent
tammy.vincent.id@gmail.com
208-866-8422

BIKE RIDE
Sunday, May 3, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Shepherdstown, WV to Snyders Landing

- See March 29**
- Distance:** 8.6 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY

DAY HIKE
Saturday, May 9, 2026

Appalachian Trail: Shippensburg Road to Caledonia State Park, PA

Discover a beautiful section of the AT through mixed forest and interesting rock formations. We will have some nice views. Most of the hike will be fairly level atop a plateau, but we will end with a steep descent into Caledonia State Park. From our meeting place, we will carpool to the hike's start, so reservations are required, and we ask you notify us if you need to cancel. The hike is suitable for those able to maintain a moderate pace for several hours on rugged terrain. There is no charge for the hike, though donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 10.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE
- Duration:** 6.5 hours
- Leader:** Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260



For this group of cross-country skiers in January, the previous week brought the biggest snow load on trees in years—a truly gorgeous winter wonderland at Blackwater Falls State Park. PHOTO BY CAROL CULVYHOUSE.

Re-enchantment: Recognizing Our Connection with Nature

Nature brings a sense of awe, connectedness, and curiosity. In a world where we can be overwhelmed by media or feel isolated and lonely, nature can provide us with a sense of balance. In the therapy world, we call moments of mindfulness, beauty, and joy “glimmers.” As an ecotherapist, I refer to them as re-enchantment.

Today’s society would have us believe that we are the top of a hierarchy, and everything is for our taking. We are led to ignore the fact that this world is bursting with life. But some of us have not let go of childlike wonder. As nature lovers, we approach wildness with curiosity and awe. We see nature as our ally and our teacher. We experience joy alongside this world’s non-human beings.

Why stop frolicking? Why stop making daisy chains? Why stop building snow forts? Why not befriend that tree?

We are beautifully entangled in a web of life. While the dominant narrative is that humans are at the top of hierarchy, those of us who love nature understand the beauty of interdependence. We are stronger working together than separately. Our survival depends on diversity in the natural world. The older I get the more important it becomes to see

nature as a friend, ally, and mentor.

My favorite symbol of re-enchantment is the dandelion. These common flowers have tenacity, beauty, and adaptability. Once so beloved by European immigrants that they were brought here as medicine, dandelions were later cast aside as weeds. Gardeners try to eradicate them, but they always return, thriving in their soft power. Beautiful and resilient, their sunny, fuzzy yellow brightens urban landscapes and feeds pollinators that we depend on.

Whenever possible, I make a wish on a dandelion, blowing its seeds of hope. In these times of great upheaval and grief, I can count on that dandelion as my ally to reseed the future.

What a lovely world to be surrounded by allies and mentors in nature! My sanctuary is



Adrienne Epley Brown finds re-enchantment by swinging into nature. (This method not recommended for all.) PHOTO BY JONI ALDINGER.

BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN

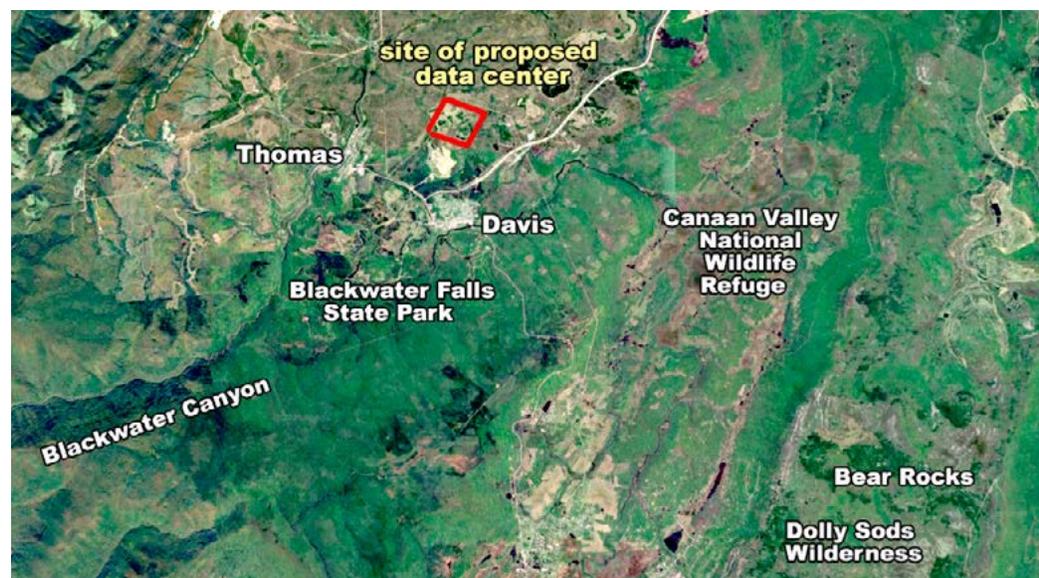
a hammock, where I hang weightless and feel a light breeze and sun on my skin, hear the rustling of leaves, smell whatever is blooming. Even though I may feel grief for the world’s ills, nature holds me while I seek answers. As Albert Einstein wisely said, “Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better.”

DATA CENTER | [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1](#)

Department’s issuance of the permit to Fundamental Data and vacate the permit.

The Sierra Club WV Chapter followed up with a letter to the WV Dept. of Commerce with comments on the draft rules for certification of high-impact data centers and microgrids, requesting 22 amendments. The letter states that the Sierra Club does not oppose data centers, per se, but wants “to assure that these facilities are good neighbors and provide benefits to the community that outweigh or avoid potential adverse impacts.”

In spite of all these efforts, the Air Quality Board handed down its decision in favor of Fundamental Data, stating that “the Division of Air Quality’s decision to rely on



DAY HIKE

Saturday, May 16, 2026

**Third Winchester Battlefield Park,
Winchester, VA**

We will discover the Third Winchester Battle of the Civil War on this easy hike. The terrain is rolling, and the path is well-maintained. We'll cover some history but also enjoy scenes of nature, possibly including a beaver dam. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

Leader: Ken Kendall
kekendall65@gmail.com
304-433-9537

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, May 17, 2026

**C&O Canal towpath, Snyders Landing to
Dam #4**

See [March 29](#)

Distance: 15.4 miles

Difficulty: EASY



These Sierrans will have good luck all year because they braved a chilly, snowy New Years Day for a walk along the C&O Canal towpath. They're shown here at Mountain Lock, near Sharpsburg, MD.

PHOTO BY ED WHEELLESS.

the assumptions and inputs provided by Fundamental Data to determine potential pollutant emissions was correct and did not violate any laws." In other words, science and community opposition can't compete against lax environmental laws.

The next steps for opponents of the Tucker data center likely include an appeal before the Air Quality Board and an appeal to the WV Intermediate Court of Appeals. (Appeals have also been filed for the Mingo and Mason counties data center power plant air permits, but the Sierra Club is not a plaintiff in those cases. Those will likely not be decided until March or April 2026 at the earliest.)

Meanwhile, bills have been introduced into

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, May 31, 2026

**C&O Canal towpath, Dam #4 to Spring
Dell Road**

See [March 29](#)

Distance: 9.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, June 7, 2026

**C&O Canal towpath, Williamsport Visitor
Center to Spring Dell Road**

See [March 29](#)

Distance: 21 miles

Difficulty: EASY

DAY HIKE

Saturday, June 27, 2026

**Tuscarora Trail, Great Northern Mountain,
Capon Springs, WV**

Our exploration of the Tuscarora Trail continues with this stretch atop the ridgeline of Great Northern Mountain. Climbs are gradual. We will have several impressive views. From the meeting place, we will carpool to the hike start, so reservations are required, and we ask you to notify us if your plans change. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 7.8 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 5 hours

Leader: Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260

the state legislature this year that would give tax breaks to data centers (HB 4013 and SB 623). Also, the Rule-Making Review Committee has advanced a proposal (HB4983) linked to the 2025 session's HB 2014 that focuses on certifying these high-impact projects, often overriding local zoning controls. This rule aims to keep project details from public view.

Statewide monthly gatherings of concerned groups began in December, with the purpose of developing a campaign and cooperating on legislative priorities. The Sierra Club and our partner organizations will continue to push against legislation that favors dirty industry above local and environmental concerns. To get involved in the fight, contact Jim Kotcon (jkotcon@gmail.com). 📧



A historic spring house was an interesting place to explore on this pre-Christmas hike in Shannondale Springs Wildlife Management Area, Jefferson County, WV.
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

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Please contact the Editor for submission guidelines or advertising rates. Contributions to the newsletter may be sent to ccraig@laurellodge.com.

**DEADLINE FOR THE 2026 SUMMER ISSUE:
MAY 2, 2026**

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



Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Spring 2026



This newsletter is printed by Winchester Printers in Winchester, VA on 30% post-consumer, FSC-certified recycled stock, using 0% VOC inks.

You're Invited to the Next WV Chapter ExCom Meeting

Get involved. Meet chapter leaders.

Learn about issues and opportunities.

The WV Chapter Executive Committee (ExCom) will meet in person at 9 a.m., Saturday, April 25, at a location to be determined. A Zoom link and more information will be available by contacting Bill Price at bill.price2011@gmail.com.

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