

M Mountain State Sierran

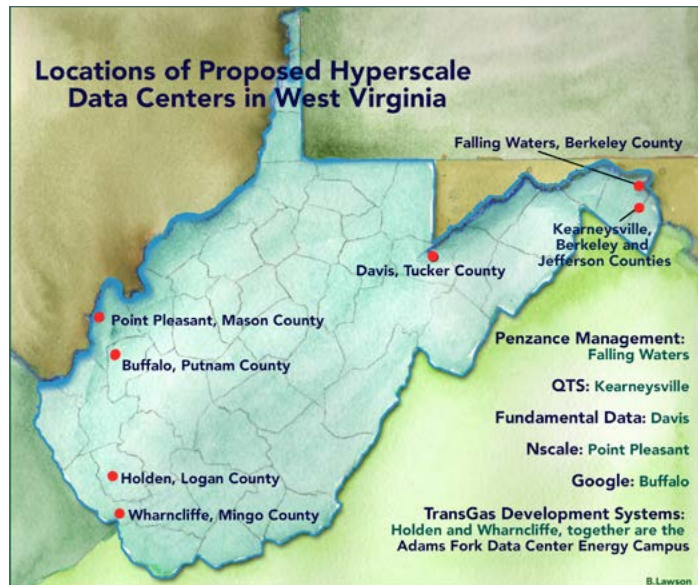
VOLUME 52, NUMBER 2

SUMMER 2026

Data Centers in the Mountain State: Dividing Up the Spoils



BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON



MAP BY BETSY LAWSON.

Mountaintop removal, fracking, and now hyperscale data centers: West Virginia never misses out on the latest trend in environmental and social destruction, thanks to our legislators. Hyperscale data centers use as much electricity as a small city and up to 5 million gallons of water a day to cool their servers—and then return this water to streams at high temperatures, impacting aquatic life. Data centers can increase ambient air temperatures up to six miles away and generate lots of noise and light pollution. Who would want to live near one?

But our governor has made West Virginia as friendly to data center development as possible.

HB2014, passed in 2025, lets data centers move in, free from any local zoning laws, while sending 70% of the taxes generated to Charleston. **HB2002** sets up a permitting dashboard to operate as a “one-stop-shop” for obtaining and renewing qualifying business permits, effectively streamlining the process in West Virginia. No questions asked, not even of heavily redacted air quality permits. At least seven projects are in the works across the state.

Fundamental Data (FD) got an air quality permit for their off-grid, gas-fired power plant to run **Ridgeline Data Center** in Tucker County (see the Mountain State Sierran Spring 2026 edition) despite massive local opposition and a lawsuit. Though a second appeal is underway, the project has powerful support in the WV Legislature, including from House of Delegates Speaker Roger Hanshaw, who also works as a lawyer for FD. Representatives for FD told the Wall Street Journal that the facility could be “among the largest data center campuses in the world,” spanning 10,000 acres across Tucker and Grant counties if fully realized.

Monarch Compute Campus in Point Pleasant, Mason County, originally developed by Fidelis New Energy, was acquired by Nscale, a British-based, NVIDIA-backed cloud provider, in March 2026. Like Ridgeline, it will be powered by an off-grid, natural-gas-fired power plant. Microsoft will be their first customer. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 15**

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Now Is the Time to Get Involved



BY BILL PRICE
WV CHAPTER CHAIR

Volunteering with the Sierra Club has always been about more than showing up—it’s about shaping the future of the places we call home. In West Virginia, that opportunity is especially meaningful right now. With major decisions being made about energy, public health, and economic development, Sierra Club members have a real chance to influence the direction of the state while building stronger, more connected communities.

The West Virginia Chapter is actively inviting people to step into volunteer roles that match their interests and availability. Whether you’re passionate about clean water, renewable energy, public lands, or civic engagement, there’s a place for you. Volunteers help organize community events, meet with local leaders, share stories with the media, and support grassroots campaigns that bring real change to communities across the state.

What makes volunteering here different is the direct connection between local action and statewide impact. West Virginia is often at the center of national conversations about energy and environmental policy. Decisions made here ripple far beyond state lines. That means when you volunteer—whether it’s attending a public hearing, helping a neighbor understand an issue, or supporting a local campaign—you’re not just contributing to a single effort. You’re helping shape broader political and cultural narratives.

Changing the political environment in the state sounds like a big, abstract goal. But in practice, it happens through small, consistent actions taken by committed people. It looks like building relationships with community members who may not always agree but are open to conversation. It means showing up to local meetings where decisions are made, asking questions, and holding leaders accountable. It involves telling clear, compelling stories about why clean air, safe water, and sustainable jobs matter for families across the state.

Volunteers play a critical role in shifting what is considered possible. For years, the dominant narrative in West Virginia has been that the economy and environmental protection are in conflict. But that narrative

is changing. Across the state, people are exploring new economic opportunities—from energy efficiency and solar development to outdoor recreation and sustainable agriculture. Volunteers help bring attention to these stories, making it easier for policymakers and communities to see that a different future is not only possible but already underway.

Changing the political environment in the state sounds like a big, abstract goal. But in practice, it happens through small, consistent actions taken by committed people.

There are also personal benefits to getting involved. Volunteering with the Sierra Club offers a chance to build new skills—public speaking, organizing, advocacy, and strategic thinking—that are valuable in any field. It’s also an opportunity to connect with others

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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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Adrienne Epley Brown, Outings	(’28)	
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EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM

Currently Inactive.
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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

You Showed Up at the Capitol. BY HONEY MAY Did Your Lawmakers Show Up for You?

Forty years ago, West Virginians started showing up at the Capitol every winter to make the case for clean water, healthy communities, and a government that works for its people. They called it Environmental Day, or E-Day for short. On February 23, advocates from across the state filled the halls of the Capitol for the 40th annual E-Day, organized by the WV Environmental Council (WVEC). Sierra Club WV members and volunteers were among them—lobbying their representatives, sitting through committee hearings, and making sure that the people making decisions about West Virginia’s land, water, and energy heard from the people who actually live here.

The night before, WVEC hosted the first-ever E-Day Eve, where community groups were recognized for their organizing work—from flood recovery in the coalfields to fighting the unchecked expansion of hyperscale data centers. The evening ended with a screening of CBS’s 60 Minutes coverage of the drinking water crisis in southern West Virginia, a reminder of what is at stake when government stops listening to the people it is supposed to serve.

CLEAN WATER: THE ASK WAS REASONABLE. THE ANSWER WAS NO.

Delegates David Green (R-McDowell) and Anitra Hamilton (D-Monongalia) came to this session with a bipartisan proposal to draw \$250 million from the state’s \$1.4 billion Rainy Day Fund and direct it to drinking water emergencies in nine southern coalfield counties. The need is not in dispute. The state’s own Department of Environmental Protection estimates it would cost \$287



WV Chapter Director Honey May confers with Chapter ExCom member Dani Parent and Delegate Jeff Eldridge (R-Lincoln), sponsor of HB 5648-the Ratepayer Bill of Rights, at the 2026 session of the WV Legislature. PHOTO BY PERRY BENNETT FOR THE WV LEGISLATURE.

million just to address high-priority projects in four of those counties, and fixing the statewide crisis would cost between \$16 and \$20 billion. Against that scale, \$250 million was not an

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

who care deeply about the same issues. In a time when many people feel disconnected or uncertain about how to make a difference, being part of a community working toward shared goals can be both empowering and energizing.

Importantly, the West Virginia Chapter recognizes that effective advocacy must be rooted in respect for local knowledge and experience. Volunteers are encouraged to listen as much as they speak, to approach conversations with empathy, and to understand the complex history and identity of the state. This approach not only builds trust but also leads to more durable and meaningful change.

For those wondering where to start, the first step is simple: Reach out. The chapter regularly hosts events, outings, informational sessions, and volunteer gatherings designed to welcome new

participants. There’s no requirement to be an expert—just a willingness to learn and contribute. Whether you have a few hours a month or more time to dedicate, your involvement matters.

At a moment when so much is at stake, the opportunity to shape our state’s future is both a responsibility and an invitation. By volunteering with the Sierra Club, members can help create a political environment that reflects the values of health, sustainability, and opportunity for all. The work is ongoing, and the challenges are real—but so is the potential for meaningful progress.

Now is the time to step up, get involved, and be part of the change. To start, feel free to contact me at bill.price2011@gmail.com or 304-389-8822. 🍀

Gas, Hydrogen Hubs, Carbon Capture, and Energy Updates



BY JIM KOTCON
WV CHAPTER CONSERVATION CHAIR

First Energy Wants to Build New 1,200 MW Gas-fired Power Plant

The big news this summer will be efforts by FirstEnergy to build a 1,200 MW gas-fired power plant at Fort Martin near Morgantown. FirstEnergy subsidiaries, MonPower and Potomac Edison, filed an application for a “Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity” with the WV Public Service Commission (PSC) in February seeking authorization to build the plant and to charge ratepayers for it.

Those costs include “Generation Projects Surcharge” (GPS) as well as “Abandonment Authority.” The GPS means that ratepayers start paying for it before they have even begun construction, and years before it starts generating electricity. The Abandonment Authority means that ratepayers reimburse FirstEnergy for all costs (plus enough to give the company a healthy profit) even if the utility must abandon the project before it is paid off.



A proposed FirstEnergy gas-fired plant could add to the haze around the Ft. Martin Plant near Morgantown. This aerial photo was taken in 2008.

PHOTO BY STOCKTON MAXWELL.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

The Sierra Club has intervened to oppose the proposed plant, and we are working with allies through West Virginians For Energy Freedom. More details and a link to submit “letters of protest” to the PSC are at: energyfreedomwv.org/gas-plant.

ARCH2 Is Back (Or Is It?)

In late April, the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) finally announced the results of its 11-month review of over 2,200 DOE-funded projects. DOE intends to retain or modify its funding agreement with the Appalachian hydrogen hub, also known as ARCH2. No information is available regarding what “modification” means, but it could involve revising the amount of funding awarded to the project or changes to the cooperative agreement outlining the hub’s plans.

Political and industry support for ARCH2 is greatly reduced. Little of the hub’s planned hydrogen production appears to be in active development. Plus, DOE support for low-carbon energy has dropped under President Trump, and many developers have stalled or dropped plans outright.

When the application for ARCH2 was approved, various participants claimed they would produce up to 2,100 tons per day. However, since the announcement of the award, companies such as CNX, EQT, and Fidelis New Energy have dropped or slowed plans for their hydrogen facilities. These three companies likely would have been responsible for an estimated 97% of the hub’s planned production, meaning that almost none of ARCH2’s planned production is in active development. The remaining five producers would likely produce a negligible amount of hydrogen. ARCH2 has not shared a meaningful project update in over a year and a half.

In reality, the hydrogen hub concept was merely a ploy to use more fracked gas. With the onslaught of data centers, the gas industry is moving its marketing efforts to the development of gas-fired power plants to power those centers. That is because gas companies have already invested billions in gas reserves. They need new markets, or that money is lost.

Carbon Capture and Sequestration

Several proposals to capture carbon dioxide from power plants and sequester it deep underground remain in development, driven largely by lucrative tax credits. But wells to inject carbon dioxide are expensive and technically difficult to maintain.

Last year, the EPA approved a plan for the WV Dept. of Environmental Protection to regulate such wells as part of a “Class VI” Underground Injection and Control program. The Sierra Club is challenging that decision, and we continue to monitor Class VI well permit applications, especially in the Northern Panhandle and Mason County.

To learn more, email jkotcon@gmail.com.

The Roadless Rule Is Under Threat: How We Can Protect Our Forests

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule, hailed as one of America's most successful conservation measures, protects drinking water, wildlife habitats, and a \$1.2 trillion outdoor and recreation economy—one that supports 5 million U.S. jobs across the National Forests system, including in West Virginia's 202,000-acre Monongahela National Forest.

Roadless areas (RAs) protect carbon and other nutrient cycles, but roads promote negative impacts and are expensive to build and maintain for an already-compromised U.S Forest Service (USFS). While arguments in favor of roads cite fire protection, the science clearly indicates that roads are related to higher fire frequency. A study by Pacific Biodiversity Institute showed that over 90% of wildfires occurred within half a mile of a road.

In 2006 the Mon Forest Plan addressed RAs and their management. These plans are supposed to be reassessed with updated data every 10 years. It has been 20 since the last reassessment, and now

there are plans to roll back protections and rescind the Roadless Area Conservation Rule nationwide. This could increase logging in old-growth forests, affect drinking water for 60 million Americans, endanger wildlife, and shut out community voices.

We must ask ourselves what kind of future we're building for those who come after us.

These RAs are some of the last intact wild forests we have. If you've spent time hiking, biking, fishing, hunting, or foraging in our national forests, chances are you've been in a protected RA. These include stunning, iconic trails and WV viewsheds: Seneca Creek, Spruce Knob, Canaan Mountain, Roaring Plains, Cheat Mountain, Tea Creek, and more. Our voices must be heard by state leaders.

Voices from around the Mountain State were heard at a Sierra Club forum on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule conducted at Davis & Elkins College on April 14. We invited our Senators and Congressional Representatives and their staff, all WV media outlets, statewide environmental organizations, students, community, and USFS staff to come together to learn the history of the Roadless Rule, why it is beneficial, and what its rollbacks would mean to Monongahela National Forest. The meeting was meant to be educational and coalition-building and to enable citizen action. Three media outlets covered the event: Metro News, WBOY, and WDTV.

The expertise on the panel was impressive. Alex Craven, a Sierra Club Forest Campaign Manager; Dr. Rick Landenberger from the WV Land Trust; David Johnston, Director of the Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Program; and Jim Kotcon, the Sierra Club WV Chapter's

Conservation Committee Chair provided information on every aspect of the rule and the dangers of any rollback. The panel spoke to a small, yet engaged, audience of community members, WVU Student Sierrans, Davis & Elkins forestry students, and representatives from both the WV Land Trust and the WV Highlands Conservancy.

The evening ended with questions and comments, closing remarks, and social time and refreshments. Attendees signed postcards to mail and gathered informational handouts to spread the word about proposed actions. At time of writing, we still have no Draft

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BY DARIA JONES



Panelists at the April 14 forum on the Roadless Rule at Davis & Elkins College (L to R): Dave Johnston, Director, Dolly Sods Wilderness Stewards Program; Dr. Rick Landenberger, WV Land Trust; and Jim Kotcon, Sierra Club WV Chapter Conservation Chair.

PHOTO BY DARIA JONES.

Citizen Groups in Virginia, West Virginia Suing to Stop Corridor H

BY BONNI MCKEOWN
STEWARDS OF THE POTOMAC HIGHLANDS

ANDREW W. YOUNG
VIRGINIA WILDERNESS COMMITTEE

On April 30, Stewards of the Potomac Highlands and the Virginia Wilderness Committee, represented by attorneys Andrea Ferster and Brad Stephens, filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District in West Virginia against the WV Division of Highways (WVDOH) and the Federal Highway Administration to stop construction of a seven-mile section of Corridor H highway from Wardensville, WV to the Virginia line. The groups say the four-lane highway would deflate the local rural economy and threaten drinking water supplies, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources in both states. They also contend that the highway agencies failed to consider less expensive and less environmentally damaging alternatives.

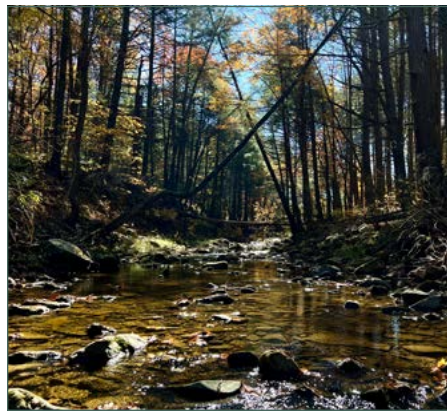
West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) had announced plans earlier this year to open construction contracts for bid by April, but the suit could present another roadblock to the longstanding, controversial project.

“Now estimated to cost \$542 million, this Wardensville to Virginia line section of Corridor H would cross through the iconic George Washington National Forest, bypass and severely impair the economy of Wardensville’s historic Main Street district, and impact the lives of farm and homeowners in its path,” reads the legal complaint. “The far-reaching consequences of this project will have economic, environmental, and other ripple effects decades—indeed, centuries—into the future.”

The groups also launched a website to raise awareness about the proposed highway: Corridor H: Highway to Nowhere (highwaytonowhere.org).

In the 1960s, the Appalachian Regional Commission planned the four-lane highway, which was slated to reach 15 miles into Virginia to connect with I-81 and I-66 in Strasburg. Since 1995, however, the Commonwealth of Virginia has said that it has no plans to build this Virginia section. Moreover, the Shenandoah County Board of Supervisors and the Town of Strasburg declared their opposition to Corridor H in 2022.

If built, the Wardensville to Virginia line section of Corridor H would end abruptly at the state line, funneling traffic into the two-lane Route 55/48, a designated Virginia Scenic Byway also known as the John Marshall



Trout Run flows into the Cacapon River at Wardensville. Questions remain on what impact the extension of Corridor H into the town’s watershed might have.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WV HIGHLANDS CONSERVANCY.

Highway. The citizen groups warn this would add more peril to hikers on the popular Tuscarora Trail as they cross Route 55/48 on the crest of Great North Mountain.

Most sections of Corridor H have been built across eastern West Virginia, from I-79 to the western edge of Wardensville, except for another controversial section in Tucker County, where environmentalists are urging a different, northerly route. But WVDOH acknowledged traffic on the corridor is only half what it projected in its 1996 environmental documents.

“We object to an unneeded four-lane that would rip through 2.4 miles of intact forest in the George Washington National Forest,” said Virginia Wilderness Committee board member Andrew Young. “This Earth Day, we celebrate the rich forest ecosystems, wildlife habitat, native trout streams, and

many outdoor recreational resources of this Allegheny Mountain region—all of which is threatened by the Corridor H boondoggle.”

“Legal action could, and should, cause our officials to rethink their priorities,” said Bonni McKeown, president of Stewards of the Potomac Highlands. “It’s time our transportation policies take ‘wild, wonderful West Virginia’ seriously and support our natural beauty, our historic towns, and people’s homeplaces and farms instead of tearing down our special places.”

WVDOH acknowledged in its 2025 federally required environmental documents that the four-lane construction would traverse 2.4 miles and 300 acres of George Washington National Forest in West Virginia, cut through an aquifer supplying drinking water for the Town of Wardensville, and decrease customer traffic to businesses on Wardensville’s Main Street. However, WVDOH has refused to consider the alternative of making safety improvements to the existing two-lane Route 55/48 over Great North Mountain.

West Virginia public officials, including Gov. Patrick Morrissey and U.S. Senators Jim Justice and Shelley Moore Capito, have continued to prioritize Corridor H, even though Morrissey announced last year that the state highway budget is inadequate for the state’s transportation needs. Highway engineer groups rank West Virginia among the most deficient states in the U.S. in bridge repairs.

For more information, contact Bonni McKeown, Stewards of the Potomac Highlands at 773-209-4712 or barrelhbonni@yahoo.com.

Courage in the Hollers: BY ROGER MAY Bringing the Mine Wars Back to the Landscape

There's a stretch of southern West Virginia where the hills still hold secrets. They're not buried too deep—they're just overlooked. Mountainside machine gun bunkers, grave markers, crumbling remnants of company towns. For nearly a century, almost none of it was marked. Almost none of these local stories were told.

That's what *Courage in the Hollers* is working to change. The project, led by the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan, is building what will become the largest labor history driving trail in the United States. The route traces the 1921 Miners' March—a 50-mile movement of thousands of coal miners representing different racial and ethnic communities, who armed themselves and marched toward Logan County in an effort to unionize their fellow workers and defend their basic civil liberties. The march culminated at the Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest labor uprising in American history.



This Courage in the Hollers monument in Marmet, WV commemorates the beginning of the Miners' March culminating in the Battle of Blair Mountain. Additional monuments will be established at various related sites in the coming years. PHOTO BY ROGER MAY.

Despite the significance of the march, its place in the region's history has been quietly sidelined for a hundred years.

The reasons aren't mysterious. As Creative Director Shaun Slifer puts it, the story was "explicitly removed from educational curricula" because it was a vivid, lived demonstration of cross-racial, multi-ethnic solidarity—exactly the kind of history that those in power have often found inconvenient. *Courage in the Hollers* aims to build awareness of this history.

HOW IT STARTED

Phase One of the project, supported by Monument Lab's national *Re:Generation* initiative and the West Virginia Humanities

Council, produced permanent public monuments in two of the communities closely connected to the march: Marmet, often considered its starting point, and Clothier/Sharples, near its end. The monuments were unveiled on Labor Day 2022 and feature striking steel silhouettes—figures modeled after real community members who volunteered to pose for the project. The silhouettes stand alongside interpretive signage that tells the story in the communities' own words, developed through an inclusive, public-meeting-based process that centered on local voices.

The results were, as the museum put it at the time, monumental.



Roger May stands next to bullet holes in the old post office in Matewan during an April Sierra Club outing there. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

WHAT'S NEW IN PHASE TWO

Now the work is expanding. Thanks to generous support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, *Courage in the Hollers* is adding six new commemorative sites across the region—in Charleston, Racine, Madison, Clothier, Logan, and Matewan. Each site will feature a mix of large steel sculptures, murals, interpretive signage, and interactive audio experiences.

Together, they'll connect the full arc of the Miners' March across county lines and communities that have rarely been linked in a shared regional story.

The project is also going beyond the physical trail. Phase Two includes a companion podcast, detailed trail maps, new original research, murals, and an interactive website—tools designed to make this history accessible to anyone, whether they're driving the route or discovering it from their living room.

COMMUNITY FIRST

One of the things that makes *Courage in the Hollers* distinctive is the way it engages local communities in historical commemoration. These are no monuments dropped into

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Winter Musings of the Owner of a Solar-Powered Home



BY ALEXANDER COLE

This past winter, as I squeegeed the snow off of my solar panels, I thought of what it used to take to get a kilowatt of electricity to my house: Miners would have to work outside in all weather, blowing up mountains or digging miles underground in dark holes that regularly exploded or flooded.

Without complicated treatment systems maintained in perpetuity, that mining would leach toxic drainage for hundreds of years, polluting groundwater and streams. Truckers would then transport that coal in heavy semis over winding backroads. Those dangerous trips would take that coal to processing plants, where it would be ground and mixed with chemicals, polluting millions more gallons of water in the process. That water would then be mixed with coal waste to form a slurry deposited behind earthen dams on headwater streams, risking the health and safety of people who live beneath them. Adding to the cost of my kilowatt, the state would need to employ inspectors at taxpayer expense to reduce the danger to coal company employees and the people living downstream. Since the coal companies are not bonded sufficiently, taxpayers would also foot the bill when those companies went bankrupt and abandoned their toxic assets.

The coal providing my kilowatt of power would then be loaded on mile-long trains and shipped to a 1960s power plant designed to last about 50 years. As my kilowatt was being produced at that aging furnace, the burning would release toxic fly ash full of arsenic, sulfur, lead, mercury, and more into the air. Though government-mandated scrubbers would reduce some of these emissions, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides would still come out of the smokestack on hot summer days, turning the air around the power plant a shade of blue and fumigating the poor people doomed to live nearby. As a result, these communities would have high rates of various cancers and chronic health conditions like asthma, obesity, and autoimmune diseases.

My kilowatt would then travel on massive, high-tension steel lines running hundreds of miles across the eastern seaboard, losing power along the

way and releasing low-frequency radiation into the areas around it.

Then and only then, my power would reach me on above-ground distribution lines—that is, unless ice or wind would knock those lines down, causing another power outage. Of course, I would be thankful that those outages were reduced by tree trimming and chemical defoliation paid for by my utility bill...

So yes, tell me again that “solar doesn’t work in the snow!” My electricity now travels about 100 feet to my house and stays 100% on site. I have a squeegee/mop on an extendable stick that I had to use twice last year to clear snow off my solar panels. Usually, my dark, south-facing panels melt ice and snow quickly, and snow often slides off when I tap them. My panels charge a bit even on cloudy days, and fully charged, I have enough power to last two or three days without any additional charging. Though my solar power still has some kinks to work out, no one can convince me that a heavily subsidized fossil fuel industry is the only thing that makes sense! Out-of-state corporations own the mines and power plants in West Virginia. We currently pay a percentage of neighboring states’ electric bills just to keep our aging power plants alive. Is that “energy independence?” Or could those of us producing power in our own backyards turn out to be the truly independent ones? Since I installed solar panels, I haven’t spent a dollar on my system. I have no monthly electric bills.

Imagine a fully distributed grid with production and storage spread out across our communities with underground distribution lines. Imagine a system that doesn’t go out with every bad storm, and where cost isn’t decided by the whims of the power companies and their friends at the Public Service Commission. Imagine a West Virginia gone solar! 🌱

MINE WARS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

communities from the outside. Each site begins with a public meeting—a genuine conversation with local residents about what they want to remember, how they want to be represented, and what their community’s connection to this history means to them. The silhouette figures in the Phase One monuments, for example, were modeled after actual people from Marmet and Clothier who showed up and said yes.

That process is continuing. A first round of Phase Two community meetings is scheduled for late May, with gatherings in Mingo, Logan, Boone, and Kanawha counties. If you’re in or near any of those areas, you’re invited. These are open meetings, and the museum genuinely wants to hear from you.

MORE THAN HISTORY

Beyond preserving this story, *Courage in the Hollers* is designed to grow economic opportunity in each of the partner communities, drawing heritage travelers and visitors who invest in local businesses, restaurants, and lodging. By joining this initiative, municipalities can become part of a recognized network of Mine Wars towns—a regional identity rooted in something real and worth being proud of.

The museum would love to see you at one of the upcoming gatherings to start making plans.

For more information, meeting dates, and locations, visit wvminewars.org/courage.



WVU'S EARTH DAY ON THE GREEN

A Celebration for All



In April, student Sierrans at WVU made Earth Day on the Green a day of learning, connecting, and fun.

On April 24, the WVU Sierra Student Coalition (SSC) hosted their largest annual event, Earth Day on the Green. The “Green” is the turf area outside of the Mountainlair, WVU’s student union. A variety of vendors filled the space, including a local Y2K-themed thrift store and environmental nonprofit organizations like Appalachian Voices. SSC worked closely with Noi Alfgeirsson, a sophomore at WVU connected with the local band scene in Morgantown, to coordinate the lineup of bands and design the event’s nature-themed poster. As visitors browsed the various tables, they listened to the musical performances throughout the day, which included Major Delilah’s gothic and ethereal pieces and Silk Stocking’s bold and energetic jams.

SSC Event Officer Abigail Wooton said, “Working with WVU to reserve and set up the space [the Green] was a huge help, since they had experience with what worked best in the past.” Her advice for students coordinating the event in future years is, “Don’t be afraid to try new things, and make it a team effort!”

All the work and coordination encouraged attendees to connect with one another. In the center of the turf, Dr. Maria Perez from the Department of Geology and Geography held environmental lessons under her toy parachute. She invited strangers to join her in lifting the material over their heads, creating a welcoming environment that connected students and professors alike.

Various nonprofits and environmental professors at WVU updated each other on their recent initiatives through pamphlets and fun handouts. These interactions proved that the movement for environmental justice and conservation creates a tight-knit community that perseveres in the face of our state’s political uncertainty.

Whether your interests lie in beekeeping or environmental policy, Earth Day on the Green provides a space for anyone who is passionate about protecting the planet we call home.



BY AUDREY BENNETT



Newsletter Changes Underway

Thanks to all who responded to our call for comments in the spring 2026 issue of the Mountain State Sierran. Based on the responses we got, it appears that our paper edition continues to be valued and read by members. It also provides a means of outreach to non-member outings participants, legislators, library readers, and others throughout the state. Therefore, we will continue to publish the paper edition on a quarterly basis and distribute it to members requesting it along with bulk distribution through select volunteers.

We also believe our electronic version could be altered in form to make it more reader-appealing, useable, and timely. Beginning with our fall 2026 edition, all members whose emails we have will receive a monthly digital digest, whose pictures and peek previews of stories will—we hope—draw you in to read the full articles. This content will consist of articles from our paper edition along with late-breaking news and chapter activities and outings coming up within the following month. Thanks to our WV Chapter Communications Chair Betsy Lawson and to the Sierra Club Digital Support Office for making this transformation possible.

And thanks especially to all our members and readers. Please spread the word and encourage your friends and neighbors to join us in promoting a greener West Virginia!

A Review of the 2026 Legislative Session

BY LUCIA VALENTINE,
KASEY RUSSELL,
AND ANNA SAAB
WV ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

The 2026 West Virginia legislative session focused largely on water-related issues, with both setbacks and successes, including the passage of the Ohio River Protection Resolution (HR 13, SR 7) and funding for flood resiliency.

While some concerning bills, such as the Data Center Rules package (HB 4983) and Aboveground Storage Tank Act revision (SB 641), were significantly amended thanks to strong advocacy, others, including the problematic SENTRY Flood Warning System (HB 4108, SB 390), failed to pass. Above all, WVEC's persistent focus on a wide range of issues helped keep these vital conversations at the forefront of legislative discussions and secured protections for West Virginians throughout legislative wins and losses. These successes wouldn't be possible without the support of WVEC's member groups and partners, including:

- WV Rivers Coalition
- WV Citizen Action Group
- WV Highlands Conservancy
- Sierra Club WV
- 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
- WV Surface Owners' Rights Organization

Readers interested in learning more about WVEC's reflections on the 2026 Legislative Session can learn more in the GREEN Newsletter, Volume 36, Issue 9 at wvecouncil.org.

GOOD BILLS THAT PASSED

Ohio River Protection ([HR 13, SR 7](#)): Both resolutions passed, showing support for the federal Ohio River Restoration Program Act, which aims to improve water quality and restore habitat across the Ohio River Basin.

Flood Resiliency Funding ([SB 250](#)): A \$25 million budget amendment for the Flood Resiliency Trust Fund was reduced to \$5 million in the final budget. Experts estimate that around \$250 million is needed to effectively address flooding impacts across West Virginia.

BILLS OF CONCERN THAT PASSED

Aboveground Storage Tanks ([SB 641](#)): Originally, this bill proposed removing protections in the Aboveground Storage Tank Act created after the 2014 Elk River Chemical Spill. Members of the Senate Energy, Industry, and Mining Committee fast-tracked the Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 641. After passing the Senate, the bill moved

LAWMAKERS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

extravagant ask: Rather, it was a start.

However, legislative leaders declared the Rainy Day Fund untouchable, and the bill went nowhere, while the same legislature moved efficiently on tax incentives for data center developers. The people asking for help were constituents with a documented, urgent need. The people who got results had lobbyists. That contrast tells you most of what you need to know about this session.

The flood resilience agenda fared no better. Most flood bills died without becoming law. The budget allocation for the **Flood Resiliency Trust Fund**—which experts say needs \$250 million to be effective—was cut from \$25 million to \$5 million in the final budget.

One bright spot, however, shows that public pressure can make a difference. Both chambers passed resolutions (HR 13, SR 7) expressing support for the federal **Ohio River Restoration Program Act**, which aims to improve water quality and restore habitat across the basin. It is a statement of intent rather than a funding commitment, but it reflects the kind of sustained public pressure our advocates have applied on water quality issues for years, and it keeps those conversations alive in Charleston.

A BILL RATEPAYERS NEEDED, A SESSION THAT FAILED THEM

Electricity rates in West Virginia have doubled over the last fifteen years, and for many

families the monthly utility bill has become one of their most pressing financial concerns. This session, West Virginians came to the Capitol for Affordability Day (Feb. 26) to support House Bill 5648, the **Ratepayer Bill of Rights**, sponsored by Delegate Jeff Eldridge (R-Lincoln). The bill laid out what every ratepayer should already have: fair rates, reliable service, transparent billing, disconnection protections, access to energy assistance and weatherization programs, access to renewable energy, the rights to dispute resolution, and the right to public participation. The bill died in the House Energy and Public Works Committee without ever reaching the floor.



WVEC lobbyist Lucia Valentine confers with colleagues during a House committee meeting at the 2026 WV Legislative Session. PHOTO BY PERRY BENNETT ON CROSSOVER DAY, MARCH 4, 2026.

through the House Committee on Energy and Public Works where it was improved by amending to only affect regulations on tanks with 10,000 gallons or less (down from 50,000) and containing ONLY brine.

Data Center Rules (HB 4983): The data center rules package passed both the House and Senate, but not without extensive effort to enact better protections around data center development. Thanks to strong advocacy

from WVEC and partner organizations, the rule was amended to require developers to assess whether their projects would place an inordinate burden on water access.

GOOD BILLS THAT DIED

Flood Resiliency Study Resolution (SCR3): In an effort to urge the Legislature to fully fund the Flood Resiliency Trust Fund, WVEC drafted a study resolution that requested the

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Legislative Scorecard Online

The Sierra Club is one of the few U.S. environmental organizations that endorses candidates for public office. Readers following our website may have seen the WV Chapter’s endorsed candidates for the primary election. Although this newsletter will reach readers after the election, you can still see how Delegates and Senators voted on environmental issues.

You can find endorsed candidates and our legislative scorecard at [sierraclub.org/west-virginia/politics](https://www.sierraclub.org/west-virginia/politics). Continue following the page through the fall general election. If you’d like to support more environmentally minded leaders in state and federal government, consider volunteering by posting yard signs, making calls, knocking on doors, or contributing to endorsed campaigns. For more information, contact WV Chapter Political Chair Molly Martin at ollymaymartin@hotmail.com.

Meanwhile, the Senate passed SB 420, the **West Virginia First Energy Act**, which would have required in-state coal-fired plants to operate at a minimum 69% capacity—a mandate that advocates warned could add hundreds of millions of dollars to the utility bills of the very ratepayers lawmakers claimed to be concerned about. Although the bill died in the House, its 22-11 vote in the Senate reflects a pattern worth naming: The legislation that would have helped ordinary West Virginians with their electric bills was buried in committee, while legislation that protected coal company revenues moved through the Senate with ease.

PUBLIC LANDS: HOLDING THE LINE

Several harmful public lands bills died this

session, including measures that would have expanded off-highway vehicle access on sensitive lands and opened West Virginia’s public lands to greater exploitation. That none of them passed is a genuine win, and it happened because organized advocates made enough noise that lawmakers could not move forward without a real fight.

The unfinished business is the **WV River Access & Bridge Modernization Act** (SB 708), which would guarantee public access to West Virginia’s rivers and streams for recreational purposes. We will keep pushing it, with support from our allies. West Virginia’s rivers belong to the public, and that principle deserves to be written into law.

WHERE OUR PEOPLE MADE THE DIFFERENCE

For all the setbacks, this session also demonstrated what sustained, organized advocacy can accomplish.

SB 641 began as a direct attack on the **Aboveground Storage Tank Act**, the law West Virginians demanded after the January 9, 2014 Elk River chemical spill left 300,000 people without safe tap water. The introduced language proposed rolling back key protections, and after passing the Senate 24-9, it moved to the House Committee on Energy and Public Works. There, our advocates were ready. The final

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Joint Committee on Government and Finance to study funding for the Flood Resiliency Fund. Unfortunately, it was never put on the agenda in the Senate Finance Committee.

Southern West Virginia Clean Water Fund (HB5525): The Southern WV Clean Water Fund Act was introduced as an end-of-session attempt to provide special water funding to 13 southern counties. After amendments were made in the House Energy Committee, the bill never came to a final vote on the House floor.

BILLS OF CONCERN THAT DIED

Anti-Science Legislation (SB 475): This bill would have prevented state agencies from using public health research and the best available science for regulatory purposes. This year’s bill targeted PFAS and would limit the state’s ability to respond to emerging contaminants. WVEC and partner organizations advocated against the bill, and it was never taken up in committee.

West Virginia First Energy Act (SB 420): This bill aimed to stabilize electric bills by requiring coal-fired power plants to operate at a minimum 69% capacity. While some legislators believe the bill supported coal and energy reliability, WVEC and others warned it would increase electricity costs, potentially adding hundreds of millions to



Buds over New River Gorge National Park. PHOTO BY KELLY VANDELLEN.

utility bills. The bill passed the Senate, but died in the House.

Community Air Monitoring (SB 88): A bill restricting community air monitoring was introduced by Senator Tarr (R-Putnam).

The lobby team met with the Chairman and members of the Senate Government Organization Committee (where the bill was referred), to outline our concerns, and it never was considered by the committee.

bill was amended to apply only to tanks of 10,000 gallons or less containing only brine. The phrase “and other fluids”—language that could have extended exemptions to chemical mixtures including crude oil—was stripped out, leaving the protections that matter most for drinking water sources intact.

On **data centers**, HB 4983 passed both chambers, but not before advocacy from our coalition produced a Senate Judiciary Committee amendment requiring developers to assess whether their projects would place an undue burden on local water supplies. We did not get everything we fought for,

but we got protections that would not exist without the people who came to Charleston and made the case.

COME BACK NEXT YEAR

What makes these positive outcomes possible is something that does not show up in bill numbers or vote tallies. It is the organizing that happens before anyone sets foot in the Capitol—the relationships built in communities, the neighbors who talk to neighbors, the people who show up to a meeting for the first time and decide to stay involved. A lobbyist represents a client, but our people represent a movement—and

lawmakers know the difference.

The 2027 session will come faster than you think. We will continue working through the year on bills that center on people, not profit! If you want to be part of it—lobbying at the Capitol, tracking legislation, contacting your representatives, or simply staying informed and engaged—we want to hear from you. Reach out at honey.may@sierraclub.org or visit Sierra Club West Virginia.

Forty years of E-Day happened because West Virginians kept coming back. We hope you will too! 🌿

Demystifying Donations: Where does my money go? What is it used for?



CANDICE ELLIOTT
TREASURER, SIERRA CLUB
WEST VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Does it seem like you get asked to donate money to the Sierra Club multiple times per month? Where do all these requests come from, and why are they asking? I'd like to provide some clarity.

First, the Sierra Club is organized geographically. The national "Club" consists of about 65 Chapters, which are usually single states, except for California, which has multiple regional Chapters. Some Chapters also have local Groups organized by regions or specific interests. Regardless, all entities are part of **one** national organization with the same rules and a common mission.

Second, it helps to understand how Sierra Club is organized financially. The Club is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) social welfare organization, meaning it can engage in legislative lobbying and other activities that are not tax-deductible. Donations to The Sierra Club Foundation, an affiliated but legally separate 501(c)(3) charitable organization, are tax-deductible and fund our educational and scientific programs. There are many complicated tax-related ramifications that determine how donations can be used within the Club, but the bottom line is: Donations to the Foundation (c3) may be claimed on your taxes as charitable contributions but can only be used for educational or conservation purposes; whereas, donations to the Sierra Club's general fund (c4) may be used for a wider range of activities but are not tax-deductible.

Third, who is sending all these requests? Many postal or email requests come from the national Sierra Club. Reminders to renew your membership may start coming a few months before your current membership expires. Keep track of when your renewal is due so you don't double-pay your membership fees for the year. The Club also asks for separate donations to fund various national campaigns with specific goals related to, for example, wildlife, energy, or conservation. A significant portion of the general fund also supports its Chapters by helping with their staff, lobbying, and administrative costs. On the other hand, the West Virginia Chapter sends out only three requests per year. In March, July, and November, the Chapter mails letters to its members and regular donors with updates on our progress and needs here in West Virginia. Donations made through these three mailings, whether by check or online payment, remain in West Virginia for our Chapter to focus on local issues.

Finally, there are different ways you can make payments. All gifts may be made as individual one-time donations or set up as monthly payments to spread your contribution throughout the year. For donations to the Club's general fund (c4), either at the national or Chapter level, you may mail a check, click a Donate button on a webpage, or use a QR code or short link to get to an online donation

form. Just check which entity is making the request so you know where your money is going. Charitable (c3) donations to the Sierra Club Foundation should be mailed to their office in Oakland, CA, and can be designated for use by the West Virginia Chapter. Membership renewals also need to go through the national office in Oakland, CA. When I receive renewal or Foundation payments in our Chapter mailbox, I forward them to the appropriate national address.

If you'd rather not receive fundraising appeals or you have questions about WV Chapter's finances, please send me a quick email at candice.k.elliott@gmail.com, or mail me a note to our Chapter PO Box. Please know, however, that fundraising is an essential activity for all nonprofit organizations. Every gift made to any subgroup of the Club, in any amount, will further the mission of the Sierra Club. Your donations of time or money are appreciated more than you know.



SIERRA CLUB
WEST VIRGINIA CHAPTER

We are working tirelessly to protect wildlife and wild places, ensure clean air and water for all, and fight for environmental justice here in West Virginia. 100% of your gift stays local and will be applied where it is most urgently needed. Thank you!

**Support Sierra Club's Work
for the Environment in
West Virginia**





Fun Forest Volunteering at Cooper's Rock!

BY DARIA JONES

The Ann Devine-King Pavilion at Cooper's Rock is a reminder of Sierra Club's longtime support of the State Forest and Cooper's Rock Foundation's work there. It was built as a memorial to the WV Chapter's former Outings Chair and partially funded by contributions made in her memory. PHOTO BY ADAM POLINSKI.

Adam Polinski, of the Cooper's Rock Foundation (CRF), is working to strengthen ties between the Sierra Club and CRF through shared work. There are always ways to help out at Cooper's Rock! Those looking to combine service work with a hike can take part in the ongoing tree planting and maintenance work in the picnic area—you can hike in almost any direction from there.

Planning service work is a collaborative effort. Adam works with representatives of volunteer groups to determine a date, time, amount of time, and task. That representative polls their group and gets back to him with the chosen date. Then Adam prepares for the event and supplies all the tools, supplies, and guidance/instruction that will be needed. He can also provide interpretive walks or hikes for volunteers who provide service work. The earliest work dates are usually in early April, although that can shift depending on

weather. He can work weekday evenings and on select weekends.

The Student Sierra Coalition, with Adam's mentorship, has maintained its role as Adoptee of the Intermediate Trail for many years. This relationship goes back to the 1980s. Adam expects the students will once again work on their section in April, September, and November of this year. He got his start with trail work with the Sierra Club in the 1980s and has worked on the Intermediate Trail

ever since. Older Sierrans can always join the students in any of these sessions.

The pollinator garden, which is on your right as you enter McCollum Campground, is another likely work target for the Sierra Club—once the Foundation's expansion plan is submitted and receives approval from the state.

Adam runs a tree-planting project in the overlook picnic area with three or more work sessions per year. They plant saplings as well as mend fences, weed, place mulch, and pick up fallen limbs and litter—and there's even drainage maintenance to be done on 750 feet of roadside trail within the overlook picnic area. This could be a perfect match for members of the West Virginia Chapter.

HOW WE CAN PROTECT OUR FORESTS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), though one may be out by the time you read this article. The U.S. Forest Service is going through reorganization and drastic budget cuts. In the meantime, the Sierra Club is trying to defend the Forest Service from these cuts while not seen as defending the directive put forth on the Roadless Rule.

We must ask ourselves what kind of future we're building for those who come after us. Nature isn't partisan, and our landscapes should be handed down to our children like beloved family heirlooms. John Muir said that the clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness. God has cared for the trees, saving them from drought, disease, and a thousand tempests and floods. Only we, however, can save them from fools.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED:

Defend the Roadless Rule and fight misguided attempts to circumvent environmental rules and policies under the guise of "restoration" or fire prevention. **Sign the online petition at [tinyurl.com/rr-petition](https://www.tinyurl.com/rr-petition).**

For deeper involvement, we welcome you to work with us at state and federal levels to support science-based forest stewardship in an era of increased wildfires. Your non-tax-deductible gifts will enable us to work with legislators and decision-makers at every level.

For more information, contact Daria Jones at dariajo@comcast.net or 304-216-1557.

Campaign Activities Beyond Coal



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

The 2026 Appalachian Studies Association conference took place at Marshall University in March, and Sierra Club members were present to learn from the wide variety of presentations and exhibits.

Among those presentations was one on the “Quilting for Community” project. Beyond Coal Campaign Organizer Lisa Di Bartolomeo convened a panel and presented the project; she spoke about the inspiration behind this quilting effort, as well as the project’s future plans. Panel attendees were enthused to see the finished product!

Lisa continues to hold listening sessions around West Virginia. In March she and WV Chapter Chair Bill Price visited Jane Lew, Weston, and Buckhannon. Lisa also visited Philippi, Elkins, and (with Chapter Conservation Chair Jim Kotcon) Wheeling. There, they viewed a coal-ash impoundment pond and met with concerned local residents and business owners. An additional listening session is planned for Weirton in May.

On April 27, Jim and Lisa visited communities in Marshall County that surround another giant coal-ash impoundment pond. After viewing the huge pile and seeing some of its effects on the local homes and businesses, Jim and Lisa joined a group of 22 residents to discuss concerns. These neighbors are so driven by the damage they see happening to their homes that the group will meet again to plan next steps. Local media covered the event and featured interviews with community members.



The “Quilting for Community” quilt is finished! Thanks to the volunteers who made at least one square, and to local artist and Sierra Club member CJ Helenski and to master quilter Tracy Dingess. Project leader Lisa Di Bartolomeo plans to unveil the quilt in Morgantown and to take it on tour to other parts of the state. PHOTO BY TRACY DINGESS.

DIVIDING UP THE SPOILS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Penzance Management, a real estate firm, is investing \$4 billion in their Bedington Campus in the Falling Waters District of Berkeley County to build a data center they are now calling an “Intelligence” Center. As developers, they “build to suit” for hyperscalers. It will likely be grid-connected. This is a speculative project as they don’t have a customer yet.

Not far from the Penzance site, developer **QTS** is planning two data center buildings on 300 acres in **Kearneysville**, straddling Jefferson and Berkeley Counties. The properties have access to a natural gas pipeline and two high-capacity electric transmission lines.

TransGas Development Systems, a New York-based company, is planning the largest natural gas-fueled ammonia plant in the world and two off-grid natural gas power plants to power two data centers, collectively referred to as **Adams Fork Data Center Energy Campus** in Mingo and Logan Counties. Both the ammonia plant and the power plants have received separate air quality permits from the WV Department of Environmental Protection. Mingo County residents filed a federal lawsuit seeking to halt the Adams Fork project, alleging violations of the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and National Environmental Policy Act.

As of March 2026, **Google** acquired approximately 1,700 acres near **Buffalo in Putnam County** for a proposed multi-billion-dollar data center campus. Google claims that they will use all renewable energy

and replenish all water that they use. Still early in the planning stages, infrastructure, power, and water use have yet to be finalized. Further information is scarce.

Note that the Tucker, Mason, and Mingo County projects all plan to use off-grid (microgrid) power sources to avoid dependence on the PJM grid, claiming this will prevent rising energy costs for ratepayers. However, this independence will be achieved by bringing four new gas-fired power plants to the state, meaning increased fracking, air and water pollution, and methane release.

Beyond the environmental impacts, we must consider the wisdom of massive data center buildout. New technology, such as the microscopic optical chip developed for quantum computing, may one day manage data with components smaller than a grain of salt, potentially replacing bulky, expensive hardware. What happens then to all the stranded warehouses full of computers and their power plants?

More fundamentally, why are we rushing headlong into this uncharted AI revolution with no consideration for how it will transform our social structure, economy, politics, warfare, privacy, and education? Should Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg get to decide the future of life on Earth? We desperately need careful, thoughtful leadership, not legislators who throw out the welcome mat to every speculator who comes along promoting a dangerous technology.

Outings

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



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**

This is part of a series of leisurely Sunday rides exploring the C&O Canal National Historical Park. We will view nature and learn about some history along the way. We will keep an easy pace and enjoy views of the Potomac River.

Distance: 15.4 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

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

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, May 31, 2026

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

[See May 17](#)

Distance: 9.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, June 7, 2026

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

[See May 17](#)

Distance: 21 miles

Difficulty: EASY

DAY HIKE

Sunday, June 14, 2026

**Hike in Canaan Valley State Park (in
conjunction with a day-long event with
Tucker United)**

We'll explore the Blackwater River Trail in Canaan Valley State Park and may have a special guest mycologist. We'll be in mixed forests and may cross some streams. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 1 mile

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 1 hour

Leader: Lisa Di Bartolomeo
lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org

DAY HIKE

Saturday, June 27, 2026

**Day Hike: 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

DAY HIKE

Sunday, July 5, 2026

Sam Michaels Park loop, Jefferson County

Sam Michaels is the largest county park in Jefferson County, WV. It includes ballfields, pavilions, and a popular frisbee golf course. Of more interest to us, however, are the conservation projects that have taken place there in recent years and the Elks Run watershed that runs through the park and provides water to Harpers Ferry-Bolivar and much of the growing county. We will walk a loop that includes turf grass, meadow, and woods. Along the way, we'll pass the abandoned farm of the park's namesake and ponder where all the water in Elks Run has gone. There is no charge for this hike, though donations are welcome. It is appropriate for any adult able to walk the distance and children accompanied by parents or legal guardians.

Distance: 3 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 2 hours

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



*Right off the parking lot at Harpers
Ferry National Historical Park, Sierrans
descended on steps past woods and
waterfalls on this April hike.*

PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



The Paw Paw Tunnel on the C&O Canal towpath is an engineering wonder of the 19th century. Ken Kendall led Sierrans on a March hike to discover it and the surrounding countryside. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE
Saturday, July 11, 2026

Mower Basin, Monongahela National Forest

We will hike in the Mower Tract. The hiking route will encompass several trails on Cheat Mountain. This is a great opportunity to see forest restoration in progress after decades of strip mining and clearcut logging. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 7.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATELY DIFFICULT
- Duration:** 5.5 hours
- Leader:** Ken Kendall
kekendall65@gmail.com
 304-433-9537

DAY HIKE
Sunday, July 12, 2026

Mower Basin, Monongahela National Forest
[See July 11](#)

- Distance:** 3.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE
- Duration:** 2.5 hours

DAY HIKE
Saturday, July 25, 2026

Flegal Reservoir, Morgantown, WV

We will hike the 2.5-mile trail around Morgantown's newest reservoir and enjoy beautiful lakeside views.

- Distance:** 2.5 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY
- Duration:** 2 hours
- Leader:** Jim Kotcon
jkotcon@gmail.com
 304-594-3322



After a March walk through the Paw Paw Tunnel on the C&O Canal towpath, Sierrans walked the overpass trail for a late-winter view of the Potomac River. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

BIKE RIDE
Sunday, July 26, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Williamsport Visitor Center to Gift Road Parking Lot

- [See May 17](#)
- Distance:** 7 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY

BIKE RIDE
Sunday, August 9, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Gift Parking Lot to Two Locks Parking Lot

- [See May 17](#)
- Distance:** 8.5 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY

DAY HIKE
Saturday, August 22, 2026

Appalachian Trail, Michaux State Forest & Pine Grove Furnace State Park, PA

Our exploration of the AT in southern Pennsylvania will end with this hike through mixed forest and past some highlights of trail history. The hike will start at one of the highest points on the Pennsylvania AT and gradually descend to Pine Grove Furnace on well-maintained trail. Because we will carpool from the meeting place to the hike's start, you must be willing to drive or ride with others. The hike is appropriate for those in reasonable shape and able to keep up a moderate pace on a mountain trail for several hours. At the end of the hike, those interested may visit the Appalachian Trail Museum near the meeting place. There is no charge for the hike, though donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 8.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE
- Duration:** 5 hours
- Leader:** Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
 304-433-1260



On an April hike through Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the group discovered remains of 19th-century water power on Virginius Island. Here they pose before the Shenandoah headgates. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, August 23, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Two Locks Parking Lot to Fort Frederick State Park, MD

[See May 17](#)

Distance: 10 miles

Difficulty: EASY

DAY HIKE

Saturday, August 29, 2026

Canaan Mountain Roadless Area

One of the Monongahela National Forest's largest Roadless Areas, Canaan Mountain is a high-elevation plateau ranging in elevations from 4,145 feet at Pointy Knob to 3,100 feet near Blackwater Falls State Park. Trails can be rocky, or muddy and wet, so be prepared to get your feet wet. We will hike about 6 miles of the Allegheny Trail (or Davis Trail) from Blackwater Falls State Park to Canaan Valley State Park. This is a great chance to see why Roadless Areas are special and worthy of protection!

Distance: 6 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 4 hours

Leader: Jim Kotcon
jkotcon@gmail.com
304-594-3322

DAY HIKE

Saturday, September 5, 2026

Tuscarora Trail, County Line, Great North Mountain, WV

Our exploration of the Tuscarora Trail in West Virginia will continue on this rugged stretch atop the ridgeline of Great North Mountain. It is an area rich in oak and blackgum forest and birdlife. Because we will carpool from the meeting place to the hike's start, you must be willing to drive or ride with others. The hike is appropriate for those in good shape and able to keep up a moderate pace on a mountain trail for several hours. There is no charge for the hike, though donations are welcome.

Distance: 8.6 miles

Difficulty: DIFFICULT

Duration: 5.5 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, September 12, 2026

Lions Head formation, Dolly Sods National Wilderness, Monongahela National Forest

We will hike to the Lions Head rock formation in the Dolly Sods Wilderness. Our route will be out and back on the Red Creek trail and the Big Stonecoal Trail. We will have several creek crossings and approximately 1,300 ft. of elevation gain mainly over 4 miles. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 8.1 miles

Difficulty: DIFFICULT

Duration: 6 hours

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

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, September 20, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Hancock Visitor Center Lot to Fort Frederick State Park, MD

[See May 17](#)

Distance: 14.8 miles

Difficulty: EASY



Tammy Vincent has been leading a series of bike rides along the C&O Canal towpath throughout the spring and will continue into summer. Here the group gathers below Maryland Heights near Harpers Ferry. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

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DEADLINE FOR THE 2026 FALL ISSUE: AUGUST 1, 2026

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

Sierrans Explore Coalfield Heritage



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

Sierra Club WV Beyond Coal Campaign Organizer Lisa Di Bartolomeo is the newest WV Chapter outings leader after leading a group of twelve Sierra Club members from West Virginia and Kentucky on an outing to Matewan, WV on April 17.

The group had a private tour of the WV Mine Wars Museum, followed by a tour of the town. That walk focused on Matewan's flood wall and its rich local history, especially the Battle of Matewan, when local miners, backed by lawman Sid Hatfield, shot it out with Baldwin-Felts agents sent to kick miners and their families out of their homes. The group also trekked across the Tug Fork River into Kentucky to visit Sid Hatfield's grave and the site of the paw paw tree incident, a precipitating event in the infamous Hatfield-McCoy feud. After the tour, the group gathered for a meal and Appalachian music, as well as to learn about the water crisis affecting West Virginia's southern coalfields from community activist Rev. Brad Davis. It wrapped up a great day with beautiful weather to learn and explore.

The following day some of those Sierrans joined Reconnecting McDowell and Trout Unlimited Southern for a roadside cleanup in McDowell County between Kimball and Northfork. The small but mighty group of five, all of whom had traveled between four and six hours to participate, gathered 37 bags of trash, along with two car tires and other larger items. Despite the hot day that came with ticks, the group enjoyed participating in the twelfth annual Make It Shine McDowell event.

Overall, the two-day event was a great way to visit an often-ignored part of the state and to mark Earth month with a much-needed roadside cleanup.



On Lisa Di Bartolomeo's Coalfield Heritage outing on April 17 and a Welch County cleanup the next day: The group gathers at the Matewan flood wall, joins forces for the cleanup, looks over the grave of Sheriff Sid Hatfield, and discovers the Matewan Mine Wars Museum with guide Tom Jude.

ALL PHOTOS BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO.



Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

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Summer 2026



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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 on Saturday, July 18, at a time and 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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