

Slurry Pond Threatens Lives and Lowers Quality of Life in Marshall County



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

When Ron Klug reached out to me about the giant coal slurry pond looming over his greenhouse just outside Wheeling, I didn't know much about coal slurry. Maybe you don't, either.

Coal slurry is liquid waste generated by coal mining and washing. Before the coal is burned, it must be washed to remove some of the impurities. The “blackwater” left over from these processes is collected in human-made ponds. These ponds hold the residue of the coal-mining process, most of which is highly toxic, including heavy metals like arsenic, mercury, and lead, in addition to coal, rocks, and water.

Longtime West Virginians may remember a famous coal slurry pond breach: the one at Buffalo Creek in Logan County in 1972, which killed 125 people and left thousands homeless.



This huge pond of toxic coal slurry outside Wheeling has devastated the quality of life and property values for its neighbors. As heavy downpours become more common, neighbors' safety is also threatened by potential breach, overflow, or groundwater contamination. PHOTO BY MARK YUNKE.

So, when Ron contacted us, we wanted to know more. Jim Kotcon and I have traveled more than once to the Mt. Olivet site, just

outside Wheeling in Marshall County. On each visit, we've met new folks who live in the communities surrounding the slurry pond. It's

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When the Waters Rise, Communities Rise Together



BY **BILL PRICE**
WV CHAPTER CHAIR

When floodwaters swept through Weston and Buckhannon in July, they left behind more than damaged homes, washed-out roads, and debris. Tragically, two West Virginians lost their lives.

It was a heartbreaking reminder that flooding is not just an inconvenience—it is a threat to our families, our neighbors, and our communities. As we mourn those losses and support those whose lives were upended, we are reminded of a simple truth: Our communities are only as resilient as the natural systems that support them. Rivers, streams, forests, and wetlands are not just scenic parts of West Virginia—they are essential infrastructure that protects our families, our economy, and our future.

For many of us, the recent flooding was deeply personal. Friends and neighbors pitched in to help one another clean up, businesses worked to reopen, and volunteers stepped forward without being asked. That spirit of community is one of Appalachia’s greatest strengths. But resilience is about more than recovering after a disaster. It is about preparing before the next storm arrives.

Scientists continue to tell us that heavier rainfall events are becoming more common. At the same time, many West Virginia communities are dealing with aging water systems, inadequate stormwater infrastructure,

and development that places increasing pressure on our watersheds. These challenges require more than emergency response—they require long-term planning and investment.

Healthy watersheds are one of our best defenses. Forests slow runoff. Wetlands store floodwater. Streamside vegetation reduces erosion and protects water quality.

**Our communities
are only as
resilient as
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Every effort to restore these natural systems helps reduce flood impacts while improving the health of our rivers and streams.

Across West Virginia, Sierra Club members are working alongside local watershed groups, conservation organizations, and community leaders to protect these resources. Whether advocating for clean water policies, supporting local restoration projects, or encouraging responsible energy and land-use decisions, our shared goal is to build communities that are healthier, safer, and more resilient.

The recent flooding also reminds us that environmental stewardship

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Chapter Political Committee Looks to Fall Elections



BY MOLLY MARTIN
POLITICAL COMMITTEE CHAIR

The Sierra Club WV Chapter's Political Committee has been busy this year with mid-term elections on the horizon!

In February, after reviewing candidates whose records indicate support for the environment, the committee made early endorsements of the following candidates:



- **Kayla Young**
Democrat incumbent | District 56 (Kanawha)
- **Evan Hansen**
Democrat incumbent | District 51 (Monongalia)
- **Mike Puskin**
Democrat incumbent | District 54 (Kanawha)
- **Lucia Valentine**
Democrat challenger | District 97 (Berkeley-Jefferson)

Candidate surveys exploring stands on environmental issues were sent out in March to all the remaining candidates running in this year's primary. After reviewing the surveys received, the committee made these additional endorsements:

WV Senate Candidates

- **Ted Boettner**
Democrat challenger | District 17 (Kanawha)
- **Mike Manypenny**
Republican challenger | District 14 (Preston, Tucker, Grant, Hardy, Mineral, Taylor)

WV House of Delegates Candidates

- **Jenny Thacker**
Democrat challenger | District 100 (Jefferson)
- **Olivia Miller**
Democrat challenger | District 80 (Monongalia)
- **Marta Beck**
Democrat challenger | District 98 (Jefferson)
- **Michael Mosteller**
Democrat challenger | District 21 (Putnam)
- **Elizabeth Sanchez**
Democrat challenger | District 94 (Berkeley)

Unfortunately, both candidates for state senate seats lost their primaries in May, but all the house candidates and all the early-endorsed candidates won their primaries.

In June the Political Committee made volunteer recruitment calls and sent emails to Sierra Club members in districts where endorsements had been made. Members can support their district candidate's campaign in several ways:

- **Contacting the candidate to see what they need**
- **Writing letters to editors in support of that candidate**
- **Donating to campaign funds**
- **Phone banking, emailing, texting, letter stuffing**

The impact that you can make in support of local candidates' campaigns can't be emphasized enough!



Host a kitchen table house party to meet the candidate and help them raise funds.

Sierra Club endorsements are valued by candidates, as they signal strong grassroots support and can influence voter turnout and campaign resources. The Political Committee's work aims to help elect leaders who will champion environmental protection, equity, and sustainability at all levels of government.

We are always excited to welcome new Sierra Club volunteers who share our passion for protecting the planet. If you want to help, you can join the chapter's Political Committee, volunteer for endorsed campaigns, or contribute to fundraising efforts to strengthen local pro-environment candidates.

a friendly set of neighborhoods, all perched on top of the hills—just like the slurry pond, which crowns one hill and threatens downhill communities, including Bogg’s Run. The WV Department of Environmental Protection’s own emergency evacuation plan offers an evacuation route that would likely be cut off by runoff if the worst were to happen.

These neighbors and friends are fed up with the constant noise, dust, lights, and traffic from the trucks bringing in coal and adding it to the giant pile. Families have to hear the backup alerts from the giant trucks that rumble along their roads and neighborhoods at all hours of the day and night. They can’t leave their windows open, even on beautiful days, because of the choking dust that coats everything. People with chronic conditions such as asthma note worsened symptoms. Mailboxes and cable lines have been ripped out by careless drivers of big rigs hauling coal. Lights on the site are on all the time, and the coal pile is so high that homes that used to have a view of sunsets now just see

a mountain of coal. Residents’ pride in their well-kept homes and yards is obvious, but it isn’t enough to save them from the loss of value in their properties that the coal slurry pond inevitably brings. It’s hard to find a buyer for a greenhouse next to a coal pile, as Ron Klug found out when he wanted to retire and sell his once-thriving business.

We estimate that the pond contains more than 600 million gallons of slurry, and the concern is that a heavy rainfall, like the ones we experience more and more frequently as a result of climate change, could spur a catastrophic breach. The risk of a breach is very real. It’s a concern not only because of the threat of inundation, but also because of toxins in the water that would escape containment. It’s hard to imagine that the slurry isn’t already leaching into groundwater and wells in the area—though water testing to confirm that has been delayed.

These folks aren’t sitting back and waiting for the worst, though. They’re organizing and standing up, and Sierra Club’s WV

Chapter is proud to stand with them. We’ve helped organize and facilitate community meetings, offering tools and expertise as the communities build their own organization. Local and state officials have started taking notice, and we hope that the group’s first goals—to have a real emergency plan, to mitigate the noise and dust, to reduce the number of trucks and the times of their travel—might help lead to real change, like shutting down and remediating the coal slurry pond for good.

Sadly, there are coal ash and coal slurry impoundments all around West Virginia.

That’s why your support of the Sierra Club is so vital—so we can help support frontline communities around the state.

This small set of neighborhoods should be full of beautiful vistas and charming homes, without fearing what might come if it rains too much. We stand with our friends looking up at the Mt. Olivet coal slurry pond, watching and worrying. 🌿

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

is not separate from economic well-being. Businesses depend on reliable infrastructure. Families need safe drinking water. Outdoor recreation, tourism, and agriculture all rely on healthy natural resources. Investing in our environment is an investment in our communities.

There is no single solution to the challenges we face, but there are many opportunities to make a difference. Supporting watershed restoration, improving stormwater management, protecting forests, and ensuring that communities have a voice in decisions affecting their future are all steps toward a more resilient West Virginia.

As Sierra Club members, we have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to continue advocating for policies that protect both people and the places we love. We can volunteer with local organizations, participate in community planning, speak up for clean water, and support investments that strengthen our communities for generations to come.

In the weeks and months ahead, there will be countless opportunities to turn compassion into action. Volunteer with a local watershed association or at a community cleanup. Attend public meetings where decisions about infrastructure, flood recovery, and land use are being made. Support investments in resilient water systems, stream restoration, and forest conservation. Invite neighbors, friends, and local leaders to become part of the conversation. Every stream



restored, every tree planted, every voice raised for clean water strengthens our communities before the next storm arrives.

The floodwaters will eventually recede. The choices we make afterward will determine how prepared we are for the next storm. Let us honor those we lost by committing ourselves to building a safer, healthier, and more resilient West Virginia. Together, Sierra Club members can help ensure that future generations inherit communities that are not only able to recover from disaster, but are better prepared to withstand it. Working together, we can protect the waters, forests, and people that make West Virginia home. 🌿

New Gas Plant in Ft. Martin Coming for Your Wallet

BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

We're all focused on affordability right now—whether it's groceries, health insurance, or power bills. Unfortunately, our state's utility companies are more concerned about profits than consumer affordability. The latest example of this is FirstEnergy's new gas plant proposed for Ft. Martin, just outside of Morgantown.

Mon Power, a subsidiary of FirstEnergy, wants to build a 1,200 MW gas plant at their Ft. Martin generating facility. The price tag? At least \$2.48 billion. Who would pay? MonPower customers would, regardless of whether the plant ever generates a single watt or even whether construction is completed. Who would benefit? FirstEnergy shareholders and speculative data centers that haven't even been proposed yet.

If you don't think this is a good deal for ratepayers, you're not alone.

We don't need this gas plant. Even MonPower's own projections for energy shortfall (around 200 MW) don't come close to the 1,200 MW they want to build. Additionally, gas plants typically take five to seven years to build, not least because of global supply shortages. It's easy to imagine the construction skyrocketing to \$4 billion or more. And West Virginians are being asked to write that blank check, even during construction, with MonPower planning to charge customers more starting September 1, 2026. What's even worse is that MonPower is asking for "abandonment authority," meaning that even if the plant is never completed, or if it shuts down as we inevitably transition to a clean-energy grid, *customers still pay*. If this investment were a good one, MonPower wouldn't be asking for a future bailout.

The Sierra Club's WV Chapter has been working with our coalition partner, West Virginians for Energy Freedom, to fight this costly and unnecessary new gas plant. We're driving public comments resisting the proposal. We're gathering letters of opposition from small businesses and nonprofits—even from the Morgantown City Council.

We've also helped ordinary folks participate in a Public Service Commission (PSC) hearing on the gas plant. On July 15, ten Morgantown residents joined WV Chapter Conservation Chair Jim Kotcon and me in raising voices to the PSC. The PSC only offers an in-person option in Charleston, but for those of us in FirstEnergy territory, that's a long trip. Because the PSC itself does not offer remote locations for residents to testify in cases that affect them, our coalition filled the void, offering remote sites in Morgantown and Summit Point (served by FirstEnergy subsidiary Potomac Edison). People speaking at the hearing, both in person and online,



When the WV PSC only offered in-person hearings on the proposed new gas plant at Ft. Martin, Sierra Club offered online access. PHOTO BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO.

unanimously opposed the proposed gas plant. No one wants to be on the hook for speculative data centers, which is what the company itself admits the new plant would serve.

In addition to the higher bills that ratepayers would be expected to pay, we must consider the other costs associated with building another fossil fuel power plant: climate change and environmental pollution. Climate change is real. MonPower knows the risks of building more fossil fuel plants—that's why they won't do it without special protections they're putting on our tab. The utility knows that fossil fuel plants will likely face future regulation and may not be able to operate as long as planned, leaving a stranded asset. Additionally, MonPower projects the plant will run 85% of the time, when, in reality, most plants run 50-60% of the time. If the plant runs less than they project, costs go up, and so do our bills. The numbers don't add up in our favor.

Cheaper, smarter, cleaner, and faster options exist. Instead of gambling on a risky gas plant, we can lower bills by investing in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and battery storage.

Are you FIRED UP to resist the proposed new gas plant?

You can still provide comments to the PSC. If you're a business or nonprofit leader, contact Lisa Bartolomeo at lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org to send a letter to the PSC. You can write a letter to the editor or op-ed for your local paper, or post on your social media and talk to your friends and neighbors. The more people learn about this boondoggle, the more opposition we can build. **Raise your voice!**

Fossil Fuels Are Making a Comeback! Or Are They?

A number of major announcements of new fossil fuel power plants over the past 18 months suggest that West Virginia is going in the wrong direction in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The combined efforts of fossil fuel companies, electric utilities, data centers, Governor Morrisey, and President Trump appear to be giving coal, oil and gas a powerful push.



BY JIM KOTCON
WV CHAPTER CONSERVATION CHAIR

Federal funding setbacks for renewable energy

Rollbacks in funding for renewables, electrification, alternative fuels and energy efficiency began in early 2025. These include cancellation of hundreds of millions of dollars in grants for solar energy and for electric vehicles, not to mention cuts to grants for reclaiming abandoned mine lands.

Then, subsidies for fossil fuels were announced, and new power plant projects started coming fast and furious. In 2024, carbon dioxide emissions from West Virginia's nine active coal-fired power plants were at 42,945,197 tons, according to data from EPA's AirMarkets database.

Proposed new power plants

Since the start of 2025, several new electric power plants have been proposed. At a time when we need to phase out of fossil fuels, these proposed power plants, if built, would more than double West Virginia's greenhouse gas emissions.

TUCKER COUNTY

Fundamental Data's facility would emit 2,051,684 tons CO₂eq* per year.

MINGO COUNTY

Adams Fork, 7,222,837 tons CO₂eq /year

LOGAN COUNTY

Adams Fork Harless, 7,222,837 tons CO₂eq /year

PUTNAM COUNTY

Google Data Center (DBA Cumulus), 167,000 tons/year (estimated based on 288 engines as emergency power sources, running 26-27 hours per year). Google had pledged to be carbon-neutral, but according to recent news, power for operations the rest of the year would come from the coal-fired John Amos power plant. If so, additional emissions may reach 10-20 million tons/year.

MASON COUNTY

Point Pleasant, Monarch Cloud Campus, 11,056,725 tons CO₂eq/year

BERKELEY COUNTY

Penzance has proposed a 600-MW data center, but a power source has not been announced. Both grid-tied and onsite natural gas have been described. Assuming coal-fired power from the grid, the increase in emissions would be on the order of 5 million tons per year.

JEFFERSON COUNTY

QTS data center ~202 MW, grid-tied. Assuming coal-fired power, greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) would be approximately 1.7 million tons per year.

DODDRIDGE COUNTY

2,060-MW, gas-fired CPV Shay power plant. First proposed several years ago to include carbon capture, the air permit application in January 2026 now says they "may" include that. Greenhouse gas emissions without CCS were estimated at 7,194,132 tons per year.

MONONGALIA COUNTY

1,200-MW gas-fired power plant proposed

by Longview (DBA Mountain State Clean Energy). Although first permitted in 2019, no construction has occurred. But the plant was recently sold to AEP and is likely to proceed. GHG emissions estimated at 3,931,696 tons CO₂eq /year.

MONONGALIA COUNTY

A \$2.4 billion, 1,200-MW gas-fired power plant proposed by MonPower. No air permit application yet, but GHG emissions are likely to be similar to Longview, 3-4 million tons CO₂eq per year.

GRANT COUNTY

Dominion Energy proposed a 2,752-MW gas-fired power plant at Mount Storm. GHG estimated at 9,595,280 tons CO₂eq /year.

GRANT COUNTY

TerraSpark received funding for permitting and engineering design work for a 1,600-MW coal-fired plant near Mt Storm. No location confirmed yet, and no air permit has been filed, but the company claims to plan for carbon capture.

Proposals to expand West Virginia's fossil fuel use

Several policy proposals and construction projects are being advanced to expand West Virginia's fossil fuel use. Key issues include:

GOV. MORRISEY'S 50-BY-50 PLAN.

This plan sets a goal to triple West Virginia's electricity generating capacity from the current 16 GW to 50 GW by 2050. The WV Office of Energy is developing details of the plan, which are due to be released in December.

WV PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

(PSC). The PSC has launched a "General Investigation" (Case number 26-0633) to implement certain statutory provisions adopted in the 2025 House Bill 2014. HB 2014 is most famous for encouraging data centers while obstructing local government regulations. But the bill also includes provisions asking the PSC to propose rules encouraging utilities to maintain their plants to achieve a 69 % capacity factor. But the PSC's proposed

rule goes further, and directs utilities to operate their plants "below cost" if that allows the plant to run at the 69% capacity factor. The bad news for consumers is that we must make up the difference to assure the utilities maintain their profits. The rule is likely to go to the state legislature early next year.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

LOANS. Governor Morrisey announced \$1.44 billion in loans from the DOE to upgrade six WV coal-fired power plants. Not mentioned is that a "loan" has to be paid back, further increasing the cost of electricity from these coal-fired power plants. The Sierra Club filed FOIA requests earlier this year asking for details as to which plants get the money, what the loans are for, and how much we ratepayers

have to pay back. But the Governor's Office and the WV Office of Energy declined to provide any information, claiming that the loans are exempt from disclosure under the state law governing the Division of Economic Development.

TRANSMISSION LINES. Three major transmission lines are being proposed to carry electricity from West Virginia to East Coast substations. The largest of these, Valley Link (AKA Valley North) is a 765 kV, 260-mile-long line from Putnam County to northern Virginia and Maryland. While the Sierra Club generally supports new transmission so that Midwest renewables can compete in East Coast markets, the developers of Valley Link insist that no renewables would interconnect and the lines are designed to carry power from coal-fired power plants.

West Virginia is going in the wrong direction in the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The bottom line

If we add up the cost of DOE loans (\$1.4 billion), new transmission lines (\$2-3 billion), and utility power plants (\$2.4 billion for Mon Power), West Virginia electricity customers are looking at very substantial rate increases that will lock in high costs (and high greenhouse gas emissions) for a generation to come.

The good news

Renewable energy, even when including battery storage, is lower cost than coal-fired power plants. Unless blocked by the policies and projects being promoted by our political leaders, the free market will drive a steady reduction in costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

**CO₂eq is a standard unit used to estimate the cumulative global warming potential of all greenhouse gases emitted, standardized to the equivalent amount of CO₂. For fossil fuel power plants, it is dominated by CO₂ emissions, but can include emissions of methane, nitrous oxide and other greenhouse gases.*

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

- Send comments to the WV Public Service Commission.
- Ask your legislative candidates what they will do to prevent these massive rate increases and pollution emissions.
- Support legislation to promote community solar and energy efficiency.
- Contact Jim Kotcon, Conservation Chair (jikotcon@gmail.com) to join our energy team.

Corridor H: Problems Lie Ahead for Highway Completion



BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON



Governor Morrissey speaks at the ribbon-cutting for the Kerens to Parsons section of Corridor H on June 22, 2026.
PHOTO BY KAYLA CASEY WITH FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER.

At the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the opening of the Kerens to Parsons section of Corridor H on June 22, Congressman Riley Moore said he looked forward to seeing Corridor H completed so he could avoid driving through Maryland, because they make drivers lock up their guns. Moore, along with Governor Morrissey, Senator Capito, and other officials, opened the third of five sections of Corridor H (connecting I-81 in Virginia to I-79 at Weston, WV). The two sections awaiting construction are Parsons to Davis and Wardensville to the Virginia state line. The latter of those two is currently in litigation. (See Mountain State Sierran Summer 2026 issue.) Virginia has no plans to complete the remaining section to I-81. (Sorry, Congressman Moore.)

The Parsons to Davis section will be the most difficult section to build due to its rugged terrain. Hearing an account from someone who lives along the less-rugged Kerens to Parsons section suggests

that problems lie ahead. Barbara Weaner has lived on a farm on South Haddix Run for 50 years. In the following account, she related **serious problems with the new highway** that will affect both the local environment and drivers using the road:

“The watershed upstream of us is entirely in the Monongahela National Forest. South Haddix was a breeding native brook trout stream prior to the highway construction. Massive clearcuts and obliteration of many ephemeral streams caused dramatic changes in sedimentation, which not only killed the trout but increased flooding.

“The worst flooding in the last 50 years occurred on South Haddix Run on May 26, 2024, shortly after the highway was paved. Water ran off the surface and shot out of the new culverts down steep hollows degraded by construction fill, discarded timber, and rubble.

Huge volumes of water barreled through our hollow, carrying large trees onto our pastures. Our farm fences were torn down. The stream broke out of its banks, across our fields, into our pond—which then broke out of its banks, flooding the roadway across the hollow. Not even during the flood of 1985 did we see anything like it.

“Since then, high water events have continued.

The most recent was on May 27, when more than 3 feet of water covered Route 219 at the newly paved exit ramp at Moore. Route 219 was closed for many hours. Heavy rain overwhelmed poorly designed drainage ditches and inadequate culverts.

“That new intersection is confusing and dangerous in other ways. The ramp exits into a tight curve on an abrupt hump. It’s a blind spot coming from either direction on 219. It’s probably lucky the flood happened during daylight—if it had been dark, fatalities would have been likely.

“The next section of the road from Parsons to Davis will cover steeper terrain. Many more trout streams will be threatened. Will

**Once the
blasting
happens,
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Corridor H is now open from Weston to Parsons and from Davis to Wardensville. The Kerens to Parsons section, just opened on June 2, 2026, has seen design problems since construction began. The Parsons to Davis section is awaiting the release of a draft environmental impact statement. As the most rugged section, it will present many structural and environmental problems. The Wardensville to the Virginia state line section is currently under litigation.

our state's highway department, the Federal Highway Administration and the DEP learn from the mistakes made on earlier sections? Will citizens get trained in stream monitoring and participate in the WV Rivers Coalition's Citizens Scientist program? Will citizens be willing to report flooding, stream sedimentation, and erosion along the construction path? Will less destructive practices and a better route be instituted?"

About 74 deep coal mines once operated in and around Thomas. The town now sits atop almost a hundred miles of shafts and tunnels, many now filled with water. At the end of May, a sinkhole opened up in Thomas, the fourth time in recent years. The Revised, Original, Preferred Alternative (ROPA) route, currently promoted by state transportation authorities, would take the Parsons to Davis section up alongside the Blackwater Canyon and build a huge bridge over

the canyon before splitting the sister towns of Thomas and Davis, where there's a thriving outdoor recreation-based economy. What could possibly go wrong?

There is a better route for the Parsons to Davis section. **Go North** is the route advocated by the people who live in Tucker County. It would connect the end of Route 48 northeast of Davis and head west, north of Thomas, to link up with Route 219. Why spend billions on an entirely new road with costly bridges atop subsidence-prone ground, when improvements to an existing road would be so much more sensible? The Blackwater Canyon, Big Run Bog, Monongahela National Forest, brook trout streams, flying squirrel and Virginia Long-Eared bat habitat, among much else, need protection. Once the blasting happens, there is no return to what was lost.

Elsewhere on Corridor H

Environmentalists and local activists continue to fight in court to stop or alter the planned Corridor H section between Wardensville (Hardy County) and the Virginia state line. WV Division of Highways acknowledges that construction of the four-lane highway in the area threatens public water supply in Wardensville. The highway would blast through Great North Mountain on the WV-VA border, including George Washington National Forest scenic areas, with unknown

effects on trout stream tributaries of the Cacapon River and the groundwater in this area of sandstone/limestone geology. The four-lane road, which would abruptly end at the Virginia border, could also harm local businesses by detouring traffic around Wardensville's historic Main Street.

To learn more and contribute, go to highwaytonowhere.org.





WVU student Thomas Hayward has been learning new skills during his summer internship with the National Energy Technology Laboratory.
PHOTO BY AUDREY BENNETT.

WVU Sierrans Use Summer as a Time for Growth and Learning



BY AUDREY BENNETT
FORMER PRESIDENT
SIERRA STUDENT COALITION

Whether you're advocating for political issues or hiking at a park, summer is the perfect time for personal growth and educational enrichment. Members of the WVU Sierra Student Coalition are busy this summer with various environmental and political-themed internships.

The club's new secretary, **Thomas Hayward**, has spent his summer as an intern for the National Energy Technology Laboratory. Funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, Thomas has been involved in field work all around the greater Pittsburgh area. Thomas, originally from Columbus, Ohio,

has explored nature both inside and outside of his internship—in his free time, he's taken multiple hiking trips in the Allegheny National Forest.

Alexis Gilliland, the coalition's social media manager, is wrapping up her internship at Tygart Lake State Park. Each day, she happily

welcomes visitors to the park and educates them about the flora and fauna of West Virginia. Alexis has also used the outdoors as her own classroom, educating herself about topics specific to her home state. As a native of Clay County, Alexis feels privileged to share her home state's story and ecology with

Summer is the perfect time for personal growth & educational enrichment



Greyson Pool is capitalizing on his love of plants during summer break, working for Plant Partners to market and tend plants at Walmart stores.

his personal favorite, the rhododendron. Customer service and communication are major aspects of his job, as he aids customers to find the appropriate plants for their local environment. Additionally, Greyson

every visitor she meets. She, like all officers in the Sierra Student Coalition, is dedicated to sharing her love for the environment with incoming students. Her main goal this fall is to involve new members of the club in environmental activism.

Greyson Pool will begin serving as the club's new president this fall semester. Greyson, a senior originally from Delaware, works for Plant Partners on their merchandising team at two different Walmart locations. He waters and cares for various plants, including

is participating in the Young Leaders Summer Institute, which is a fellowship through the Democracy House. He has completed modules focused on understanding power, creating public narratives, and maintaining democracy. These experiences have strengthened Greyson's leadership skills, which will help as he guides the Sierra Student Coalition in the coming year.

We can't wait to see the new policies and innovations that these students will bring about in the future.



Alexis Gilliland has shared her love and knowledge of West Virginia nature during her summer internship at Lake Tygart State Park. That sharing will continue as she returns to WVU classes in the coming school year. PHOTO BY AUDREY BENNETT.



HELP SHAPE WVEC'S FUTURE
WVEC ANNUAL MEETING
BLACKWATER FALLS STATE PARK LODGE
OCTOBER 3, 2026
REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!

WVECOUNCIL.ORG



Join us at West Virginia Environmental Council's fall retreat and annual meeting on October 2-3.

Share your perspective, insights, and ideas, directly influencing the policies and actions we take to improve the lives of West Virginians. Register for the meeting at **tinyurl.com/wvecouncilregister**. There's still time to reserve a room at the State Park Lodge through a discount block. Call **304-259-5216** and mention WVEC to receive the discount rate. Camping is available as well.





Valley North Transmission Line Threatens Family Farm in Lewis County

BY KAYTELY CARPENTER-BEAM

I grew up in rural Appalachia, on a farm nestled among the West Virginia foothills of Lewis County. I remember as a little girl running around the hayfield of our farm with my little brothers. We were outside because the sun was, and Mom wasn't having us spend our summers sleeping in or sitting in front of the TV. On a typical day, we might head to the very end of the meadow. The sun beat down, and we were hot. The creek shimmered, fairly clear and more than a little enticing, so we kicked our shoes off (they never stayed on long anyway), dipped our feet in, built little rock towers, looked for crawdads, and played pretend. These were the days my childhood was made of, and they're the days I miss.

I look off my parents' porch right now and see the meadow that was once my playground, the hillside that was the setting for so many pretend adventures, from pirate ships in the trees to fairy caves in the thicket that looked purple when the sun was setting. That farm allowed my imagination to run wild. As adults, our imaginations get uglier; reality is always lurking at the fringes. More recently, I've been forced to imagine my family's farm torn up, with equipment and dirt everywhere, so that Valley North can run their transmission line up the center.

The Valley North Transmission Project is a 260-mile transmission line running across 20 West Virginia counties, all of which have taken a staunch stance against the intrusion. This transmission line will be powering Northern Virginia, home of "Data Center Alley" (Technical.ly). Recently, Valley Link, the company behind

the project, held a series of open houses in WV counties that are along their proposed route. At my local session, the information provided was confusing, concerning, and inconsistent.

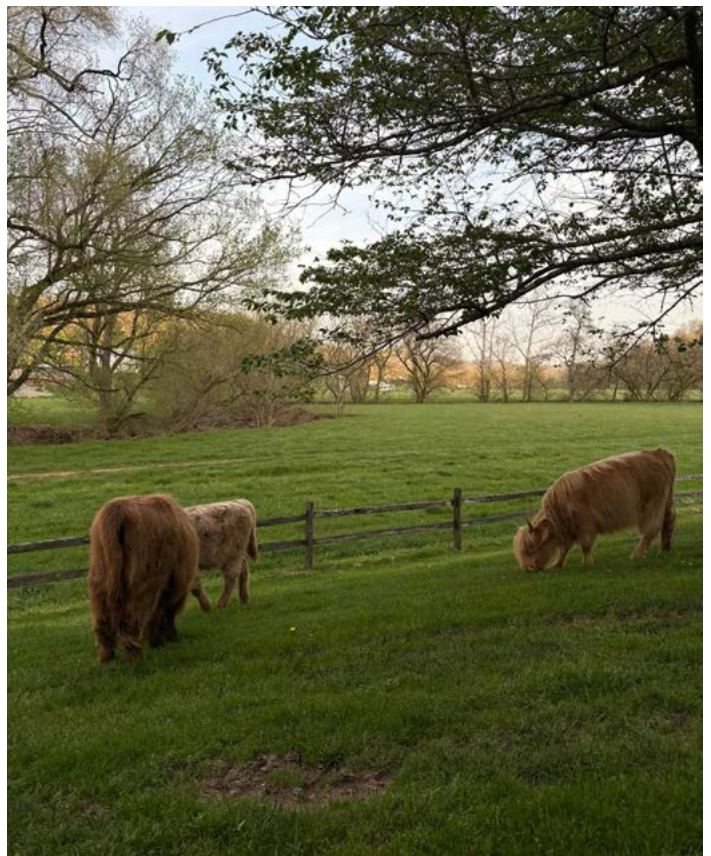
As I bounced from table to table like it was a middle school science fair, I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety and bewilderment. No one representative could answer more than a question or two, so getting information meant being passed from person to person. When asking a representative about the possibility of invoking eminent domain, I was cut off quickly because that's apparently the Voldemort of this whole project—maybe if we don't name it, it can't hurt us. Regardless, the representative informed me that ideally Valley Link and landowners would be able to come to a mutually beneficial agreement, and eminent domain won't even have to be considered. After all, don't CEOs always kumbaya with the working man?



The working folks of West Virginia are arguably the most easily exploitable population in the nation; the state's natural resources are used largely to benefit others, whether it's coal and silica mining, the oil and gas industry, or even timber logging and wind turbines. West Virginia, one of the highest exporters of energy in the country, remains one of the most impoverished states on the census from year to year. As Governor Patrick Morrisey says, we're the "Battery of the East Coast" (never mind that no battery can run forever). This transmission line is just the latest example of an unsustainable trend. Virginia needs the power but doesn't want the headache, so it's left to their "hillbilly" neighbors to boost their electrical grid. However, few things are more important to us hillbillies and rednecks than the land we were raised on.

This is the land where we bury our loved ones on hillside cemeteries, grow the food that graces our tables, and run barefoot through the trees. It's our constant, even as it's ever-changing. And most importantly, for a lot of us, it's all we have.

Editor's Note: *The 260-mile Valley Link line threatening Kaytely's family farm is one of several projects proposed by grid operator PJM and will run from Putnam County, WV to Frederick County, MD. While the Sierra Club recognizes the need for, and supports, more transmission to allow access to renewable energy, Valley Link has stated that they have no plans to interconnect with renewables, and the line is solely for fossil fuel-fired electricity. If you are concerned about this buildup and its effect on the people and land of West Virginia and would like to take action, contact Jim Kotcon at jkotcon@gmail.com.*



Happy Highland Farm in Lewis County today is peaceful and idyllic. It's also threatened by Valley Link's proposed transmission lines that would bring fossil-fueled power to data centers out of state.

PHOTOS BY KAYTELY CARPENTER-BEAM.

The Lorax Speaks for the Trees – Your Voice Needed, Too!

Because the trees cannot speak for themselves, “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.” Dr. Seuss’s cautionary fable about corporate greed, consumerism, and environmental destruction attempts to move people to be proactive stewards of our environment.



BY DARIA JONES



“Unless
someone
like you cares
a whole awful
lot, nothing
is going to
get better.
It’s not.”

—The Lorax

The tale stresses the importance of individual action through the story of one boy who passes on hope that nature can be restored if the next generation values it enough to act. The Sierra Club, along with a coalition of other conservation organizations, is helping this cause by collecting signatures to stop the rescinding of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, a policy that protects roadless areas in federal lands. In July, the Public Lands Committee of the Club’s WV Chapter held a tabling event at the annual Appalachian Fly Fishing Festival in Thomas. Public education, collection of signatures in support of the rule, and coalition-building were the goals. Many anglers and hunters don’t want this successful conservation measure to be lost. We and our partners want to protect our public lands

and maintain pristine waters and wildlife habitat. Many signatures were gathered and some new members recruited. While still waiting on the Direct Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), it is paramount to keep voicing our objections and concerns. You may still sign an online petition at: **tinyurl.com/publiclandspetition**. The Public Lands Committee also recently submitted comments to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on the proposed Pine to Spruce project in the Greenbrier Ranger District of Monongahela National Forest. Our letter opposes categorical exclusion (CE), a process that would allow the project to proceed without an environmental impact statement. While the USFS has made great efforts to restore red spruce forests, we

believe additional analysis for this project is warranted by the large size and presence of wetlands in the project area and the absence of protections for existing spruce stands. We especially are concerned about proposed timbering and forest carbon sequestration. Portions of the unit should not be designated for commercial clear-cut harvesting. We will continue to monitor and advocate for our beloved public spaces in West Virginia. We can always use your help and contributions in any form. Unless someone like you speaks up clearly and strongly, many of our special places will be lost.

SCAN TO SIGN OUR
ONLINE PETITION:



Newsletter Additions Coming Your Way

The Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter recently considered eliminating its paper newsletter and moving to an all-electronic digest version of its news to members and friends. The thought was that this change might increase readership and membership involvement and save chapter funds.

We quickly learned that the quarterly Mountain State Sierran is still valued by a number of our members and that the paper edition continues to serve as a good means to inform the public and recruit new members.

However, we still believe that a more frequent electronic email version may provide more timely information about our issues and campaigns and may reach some individuals who do not generally open the paper edition or the PDF file on their computers.

So, thanks to willing volunteers, we have decided to offer the best of both worlds. The Chapter will continue to publish the Mountain State Sierran four months of the year, distributed to your mailbox or your email inbox. But in all other months, members who

can and want to receive our emails will be sent a digest of late-breaking Chapter news and alerts, upcoming events and outings, and an in-depth article or two. Thanks especially to chapter communications chair Betsy Lawson for her leadership in producing this new publication.

We value all of our members and volunteers, and we look forward to keeping in touch with more of you more often. If you have suggestions or comments about our newsletter, please feel free to contact the volunteer editor, Chris Craig, at ccraig@laurellodge.com or 304-433-1260.



Quilt Display

BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

June 2 marked the debut of the Sierra Club WV Chapter's "community quilt," created by a dedicated team of volunteers and crafters in Morgantown over the winter. While working, the group explored community action to raise awareness about climate change. The event garnered attention from local artists, residents, and media. The quilt will be displayed in Morgantown at the Monongalia Arts Center until August 14; after that, the quilt will visit Montgomery (Fayette County) at the Gallery on 4th. Keep an eye on our social media (facebook.com/sierraclub.westvirginia) to see when the quilt might come to a place near you! PHOTO BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO.

SCAN TO GO TO
OUR FACEBOOK:



Outings

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



DAY HIKE

Saturday, August 22, 2026

Appalachian Trail (AT), 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 landmarks 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 a 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



Not surprisingly, pollinators made a showing at an early May wildflower walk at Thompson Wildlife Refuge near Paris, VA. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, August 23, 2026

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

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 history along the way. We will keep an easy pace and enjoy views of the Potomac River. There is no charge for this ride, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 10 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, August 29, 2026

Canaan Mountain Roadless Area

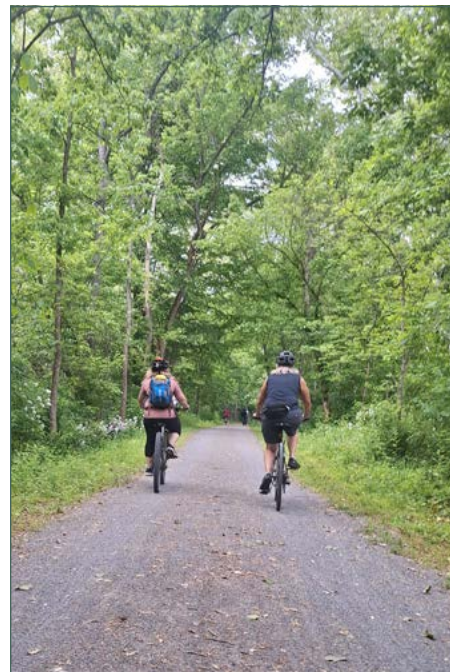
One of the Monongahela National Forest's largest Roadless Areas, Canaan Mountain is a high-elevation plateau ranging in elevations from 4,145 feet at Pointy Knob to 3,100 feet near Blackwater Falls State Park. Trails can be rocky, or muddy and wet, so be prepared to get your feet wet. We will hike about 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



Riding along the C&O Canal towpath in mid-May. PHOTO BY KEN KENDALL.

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



McMahon's Mill provided a pastoral launch for Sierra bicyclists on this Memorial Day ride along the C&O Canal towpath. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

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

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 history along the way. We will keep an easy pace and enjoy views of the Potomac River. There is no charge for this ride, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 14.8 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

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

NATURE WALK

Saturday, October 3, 2026

Cool Spring Preserve, Charles Town, WV

Cool Spring Nature Preserve is a 63-acre tract of land owned and managed by the Potomac Valley Audubon Society. It features forest, meadow, and marsh, and is bordered on one side by Bullskin Run. It is designated as a birding "hot spot" and also has significant historical value since much of the tract was once owned and leased out by George Washington. We will hike the perimeter trail plus explore a few of the cross sections featuring old orchards or avian flyways. This hike is appropriate for families or adults capable of handling unpaved trails on gently rolling terrain. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome. There is no charge for this hike, though donations to PVAS for their expenses at Cool Spring are welcome.

Distance: 1.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 1.5 hours

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



Just upstream from Sharpsburg, MD on the C&O Canal towpath, Killiansburg Cave once provided refuge for area residents during the 1862 Battle of Antietam. In May, Sierra riders found it a more peaceful setting. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.



On the flatwater section of the Potomac south of Williamsport, MD, there was no need to build a canal for safe passage for barges in the 1830s. Sierrans discovered this area of the "Big Slackwater" on this Memorial Day ride along the C&O towpath. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

BIKE RIDE

Sunday, October 4, 2026

C&O Canal towpath, Paw Paw Tunnel to Lock 68, MD

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 history along the way. This particular ride will take us through one of the primary sites of the canal towpath—the Paw Paw Tunnel. We will keep an easy pace and enjoy views of the Potomac River. There is no charge for this ride, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 17.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3.5 hours

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



Temperatures during an early May ride from Snickers Landing, near Sharpsburg, MD, were cool enough that riders stayed bundled up. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE

Sunday, October 18, 2026

Poor House Farm, Berkeley County, WV

This hike will be on trails for hiking, biking, and disc golf at Poor House Farm County Park. We will see orchards, forests, and farms. While hiking, we will learn some of the history of the farm, check out the new WV Tourism swing, and close with some ghostly lore, apple cider, and pumpkin treats. The hike is open to anyone who can handle walking on some uneven ground and some inclines on a steep grassy hillside. Bring your disc golf frisbees if you like. The hike is free, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 4.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY TO MODERATE

Duration: 2.5 hours

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



Sierrans took time for a stop at Potomac Dam #4 on this May ride along the C&O. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

AFTERNOON HIKE

Saturday, November 7, 2026

Sweet Run State Park, Purcellville, MD

Enjoy the fall foliage and see some raptors on this hike. The trail winds through lush forests and open meadows along with the remnants of a 19th-century farming community, including historic structures and Wortman Pond. At 5:30 p.m. the Secret Garden of Bees and Birds will have a presentation with raptors.

Distance: 4.5 miles

Difficulty: EASY TO MODERATE

Duration: 3 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, November 14, 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 to 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, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 10.5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 6.5 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, December 5, 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. This hike is suitable for those able to maintain a moderate pace for several hours on rugged terrain. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 8.5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 5 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Sunday, December 27, 2026

Cacapon State Park, Berkeley Springs, WV

De-stress in nature on this post-holiday hike. We will be doing a variety of trails in the park. The trails are on uneven ground and varying terrain. Well-behaved dogs are welcome but must be on a leash. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

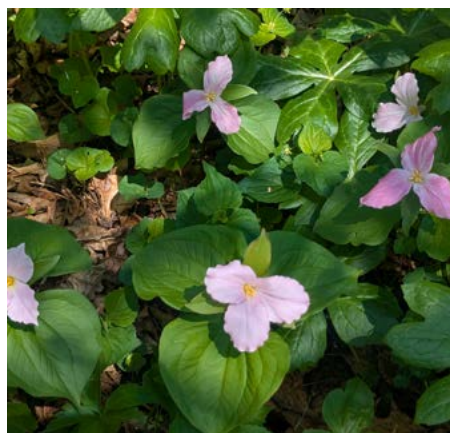
Duration: 3 hours

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



Thompson Wildlife Management Area, near Paris, VA is known as one of the best sites in the country for viewing spring wildflowers. Sierrans found the perfect time for viewing the blooms on Tammy Vincent's early May hike.

PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.



Some of the wildflowers discovered on Tammy Vincent's Trillium Hike in Thompson Wildlife Management Area, Paris, VA, in early May. PHOTOS BY TAMMY VINCENT AND FLORINA BEBA.

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DEADLINE FOR THE 2026-27 WINTER ISSUE: NOVEMBER 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.



Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

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Fall 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 online 6-8PM, Thursday, October 1. A Zoom link and more information will be available by contacting Bill Price at bill.price2011@gmail.com.

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