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Midterm Elections Bring About Change in the WV Legislature

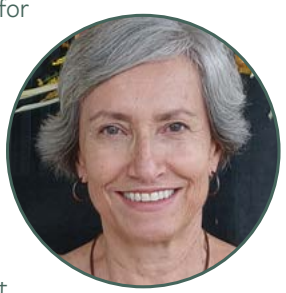


Lucia Valentine is the new delegate from West Virginia's 97th House District. A former WV Environmental Council lobbyist, she is one of seven Sierra Club-endorsed candidates who will be changing the face of the WV Legislature in 2027. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUCIA VALENTINE.

Although West Virginia still remains one of the most Republican states in the union, the November 3, 2026 midterm election results made it clear that there are a good number of voters who want change and that money isn't always the determining factor in campaigns.

The biggest challenge that West Virginia faces is low voter participation rates. Only 38% of West Virginia's registered voters participated in the 2026 midterm elections. The Sierra Club's WV Chapter Chair, Bill Price, is concerned and asks, "What can grassroots community leaders do to reverse this trend?" He suggests, "Civic education coupled with listening to non-voters about what they would need to see to get them engaged."

The elections saw the return of high-profile incumbents at the federal level with Shelly Moore Capito capturing 58.3% of the votes compared to Rachel Fetty-Anderson with 37.9%. Riley Moore had 59.4% of votes compared to Ace Parsi's 40.6%. Considering the funds that Capito and Moore had at their disposal, the numbers of the challengers should be a message to Capito and Moore that West Virginians are looking for something different than the status quo.



At the state level, Democrats more than doubled their numbers in the House of Delegates, going from nine to 21. They made similar gains in the Senate, going from two to four. These numbers indicate a historic shift in the local legislative composition.

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BY MOLLY MARTIN
POLITICAL COMMITTEE CHAIR

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

A Political Shift—and a Lesson in Grassroots Power



BY BILL PRICE
WV CHAPTER CHAIR

West Virginia's November 3 election delivered a mixed message in the state. Republicans retained the state's two U.S. House seats and U.S. Senate seat, and they will continue to control both chambers of the Legislature. But beneath that continuing Republican dominance, something important happened: Democrats made significant gains in the WV House of Delegates and State Senate.

According to unofficial results, Democrats more than doubled their representation in the House of Delegates, increasing from nine seats to 21. In the State Senate, Democrats grew from two seats to four. Republicans will retain their supermajorities, but these gains give Democratic lawmakers a stronger voice in legislative debates and greater opportunities to demand transparency and accountability.

These results deserve attention—not because one party's gains automatically guarantee better environmental policy, but because they demonstrate that political outcomes are not fixed. Candidates who organize, engage voters directly, and address concerns people experience in their daily lives can make a difference, even in a state where their party faces formidable obstacles.

That is an important lesson for environmental advocates.

The election campaigns brought attention to issues such as affordability, public education, and the expansion of data centers. These are also issues with significant environmental implications, including electricity demand, utility costs, local decision-making, and the protection of community resources. The gains made by individual candidates reflect the importance of connecting public policy to the concerns people express in their own communities. But we should not mistake electoral gains for the finish line. More voices in the Legislature create opportunities; they do not guarantee outcomes. Environmental protections will still require public engagement, informed advocacy, coalition-building, and persistent pressure on elected officials of every party.

The larger lesson is that grassroots leadership matters. People who knock on doors, listen to their neighbors, recruit candidates, organize public meetings, and make the connections between policy and everyday life can change the political conversation. The same principles apply to protecting West Virginia's water, air, public lands, and communities.

For the Sierra Club, the task is clear: build on this moment by strengthening our local relationships, developing new volunteer leaders, and bringing more West Virginians into environmental advocacy. We should welcome opportunities to work with any elected official who is willing to advance sound environmental policies, while holding all of them accountable when they fall short.

The election has opened some doors. It is up to citizens and community organizations to make the most of those opportunities.

Our work continues—not simply to influence the next election, but to build the lasting grassroots power needed to protect West Virginia for generations to come.

West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Directory

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Term ends at first meeting of indicated year.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Progress in the Election and in the Courts



BY HONEY MAY
WV CHAPTER DIRECTOR

On Tuesday, November 3, voters across the country sent a message. Democrats won control of both the U.S. House and Senate, flipping Senate seats in places like Texas, Ohio, Kansas, and South Carolina.

And here in West Virginia, one of the reddest states in the nation, things moved too. Democrats more than doubled their numbers in the Legislature. Senator Capito won re-election by about 20 points. Two years ago, Republicans won our other Senate seat by 41 points. That tells me something about what people want right now: leaders who answer to them and a check on power that's gone unchecked for too long.

A failed attempt to suppress climate activism in WV. I've been thinking about this swing in the context of something that happened to the Sierra Club this fall. It happened in West Virginia but matters far beyond our chapter.

On September 23, WV Attorney General J. B. McCuskey served the Sierra Club with a subpoena. He wanted ten years of our records: our protected strategy and communications, how we work, and who we work with. He was investigating what we say about climate change.

This was a blatant attempt to curb our speech and silence us.

He attempted to do it under the state's consumer protection law. Part of that law exists to protect you from companies that lie to sell you something. We don't sell anything; nobody was cheated. What we do is speak up for clean air, clean water, and the people who live with the consequences when polluters cut corners. That isn't deception; it's citizenship.

We didn't hand over a single page. Our attorneys immediately prepared a First Amendment lawsuit to protect our constitutional rights. After all, if they can do this to Sierra Club, they can do the same to any group, on any issue. The day we told his office the suit was coming, he withdrew the subpoena. That should tell you something.

We weren't alone. A week earlier, on September 16, he sent nearly identical subpoenas to our friends at West Virginia Rivers Coalition, 350.org, and at least four other groups. He asked for almost ten years of records: drafts, internal debates, names of board members, coalition partners, comments to state agencies, and in some circumstances, even the names of their donors.

WV Rivers and 350.org took him to court. On October 29, U.S. District Judge Joseph R. Goodwin blocked the subpoenas, and his reasoning was plain. Advocacy isn't commerce. You can't use a consumer protection law to investigate people for their opinions. And the demands were so out of proportion to the attorney general's stated reason that the judge said instead of going fishing with a fishing pole or net, the attorney general had "brought dynamite to the lake."

That temporary restraining order holds through November 12. A hearing on a longer-term injunction hasn't been scheduled yet. I'll keep you posted.

Why this matters. This was an attempt to strip us of our constitutionally protected rights. If an attorney general can do this to the Sierra Club and our allies, he can do it to a church group, a watershed association, or a few neighbors standing up to a data center. This was never about one organization. It's about whether West Virginians can disagree with powerful people without being punished for it.

So I'll say it plainly: We will keep doing this work. We'll keep showing up at the Capitol, at the Public Service Commission, and in the communities that need us. Being targeted tells me our work is landing.

Stand with us

- Give to the Sierra Club's Legal Defense Fund at **sierraclub.org/environmental-law.**
- Keep speaking up. Write the letter. Make the call. Show up. That's exactly what they're trying to stop.

Tuesday reminded me to work harder in the face of these tactics. It reminded me that ordinary people want elected leaders who work to make their lives better, not waste time and taxpayer money on baseless investigations. When the Legislature convenes in January, Democrats will have enough members to force recorded votes on amendments, and likely enough to keep bills from being rushed through without the required readings. That means more lawmakers on the record, more chances for you to be heard, and more reason to keep showing up.

Power that answers to no one gets bolder, as we have seen. That's why our work is so important.

Thank you for standing with us.

Sources: Fighting the West Virginia Attorney General's Investigation, Sierra Club, Oct. 26, 2026 (tinyurl.com/sc-ag-investigation); Memorandum Opinion and Order, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, Inc. v. McCuskey, No. 2:26-cv-00679 (S.D. W. Va. Oct. 29, 2026); Mountain State Spotlight, Nov. 4, 2026 (tinyurl.com/ms-spotlight); West Virginia Watch, Nov. 4, 2026 (tinyurl.com/wv-watch-ag). Election results are unofficial.

Gearing up for the 2027 WV Legislature



BY JIM KOTCON
WV CHAPTER CONSERVATION CHAIR

In the recent midterm election, many candidates ran campaigns to lower electric bills and to better regulate data centers; in fact, those issues dominated the 2026 races. **But how will this actually play out in the coming legislative session? A good indication may come from bills seen in previous years.**

Some Good Ideas

The Sierra Club will work with allies in the WV Environmental Council and West Virginians for Energy Freedom to prioritize legislation allowing community solar as an option for customers seeking lower-cost electricity. Another option will be a bill to authorize *balcony solar* (sometimes called *plug-in* or *DIY solar*). While these smaller panels cannot produce as much electricity as larger rooftop installations or utility-scale solar, they can supplement homes with very cost-competitive electricity, because they do not need expensive retrofits or net-metering agreements. A broader "Ratepayer Bill of Rights" would address a range of issues to benefit consumers, including protection from disconnection, giving consumers the right to know, and, most importantly, directing the Public Service Commission to prioritize customers in decision-making.

Other issues relate to impacts from fossil fuels, including legislation to mandate plugging and reclaiming gas wells. An Orphan Well Prevention Act would mandate that gas companies provide funding upfront to assure that wells are plugged at the end of their useful life.

Bills to promote renewable energy on old mine sites, to provide community input and regulation for data centers, to provide public access to streams for recreation, and to ensure safe drinking water are sure to reappear.

Bad Bills Likely to Resurface

Some legislators are sure to reintroduce bills to restrict renewables and promote fossil fuels. These bills may include efforts to mandate more coal consumption and prioritize "baseload" generation over "intermittent" sources. Gov. Morrisey and key legislators continue to attack renewables as unreliable, in large part because wind and solar are cheaper than coal-fired electricity. The economic competition from cheaper gas and renewables is a key reason that many existing coal-fired power plants have operated less than half the time. Coal simply cannot compete. A key initiative is Gov. Morrisey's "50-by-50" Plan, aimed to triple electric generation by 2050. However, a surefire way to increase our electric bills is to build power plants and transmission infrastructure that is not needed. Currently, utilities are guaranteed a profit on any investment they make, which creates a powerful incentive to overbuild and leave ratepayers stuck with stranded costs.

Many of these bills are based on the misguided perception that fossil fuels are cheaper or more reliable, and that simply is not true. Relying on coal is sure to increase our electric bills and our health care costs, not to mention the adverse impacts on climate change.

Gov. Morrisey's efforts in September to make West Virginia part of U.S. Department of Energy's Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus program fell apart when it became clear that it would make West Virginia a target for nuclear waste from other states. Nevertheless, bills to promote nuclear energy are sure to appear. The Sierra Club's position is that we need to decarbonize our energy sources quickly and therefore should look at all forms of energy, but we should invest in the fastest, cheapest, cleanest, and safest sources first. Nuclear is none of those.

Other bad ideas likely to resurface include bills to restrict citizen monitoring of pollution, further weaken aboveground storage tank rules, and restrict the scientific information used to set pollution standards. Past legislatures have also seen efforts to open public lands to off-road vehicles, expand carbon capture and sequestration, and weaken rules for so-called "advanced recycling" (using pyrolysis and other methods to convert plastics into other products, but really mostly just burning it).

What You Can Do

This month is a great time to organize an "in district" meeting with legislators. Invite them to your favorite coffee shop or organize a kitchen table event. These kinds of meetings are much more informal, much less rushed than a meeting at the Capitol and are critical to building a relationship with legislators.

Contact Jim Kotcon at **jkotcon@gmail.com** or **304-594-3322** for help on getting started, details of legislation, and talking points.

Also, consider signing up for the WVEC newsletter and Action Alerts at **tinyurl.com/wvecouncil.**



In October WV Beyond Coal Campaign Organizer Lisa Di Bartolomeo tabled at the New River Gorge Mountain Bike Festival in Fayetteville, WV, to educate mountain bikers on the EPA's proposed rollback of the Endangerment Finding, the Roadless Rule, and other campaign work.
PHOTO BY BRYAN STEALEY.

MID-TERM ELECTIONS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Olivia Miller will be the new delegate from WV's 80th House District.
PHOTO COURTESY OF OLIVIA MILLER.

Democratic women made strides in West Virginia on Election Day, winning eight seats in the House of Delegates. Among all U.S. states, West Virginia's Legislature has the fewest number of women lawmakers, with just 12 Republican and Democratic women serving in the House. In 2027, that number will grow to 19.

Congratulations to all the candidates who participated! To the winners, your hard work, strategy, and dedication truly paid off! To those who didn't win their seats this time, your resilience and determination are what make a great competition, and we can't wait to see you come back even stronger next time!

Seven of the eleven candidates endorsed by the West Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club won their races in the November election. The remaining four were challengers who fell short in their bids for office.

Here's a closer look at the results:

HOUSE OF DELEGATES

WINS:

Steve Williams (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 24 (PUTNAM)

Evan Hansen (D)
INCUMBENT, DISTRICT 51 (MONONGALIA)

Mike Puskin (D)
INCUMBENT, DISTRICT 54 (KANAWHA)

Kayla Young (D)
INCUMBENT, DISTRICT 56 (KANAWHA)

Olivia Miller (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 80 (MONONGALIA)

Lucia Valentine (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 97 (BERK.-JEFF.)

Jenny Thacker (D)
CHALLENGER. DISTRICT 100 (JEFFERSON)

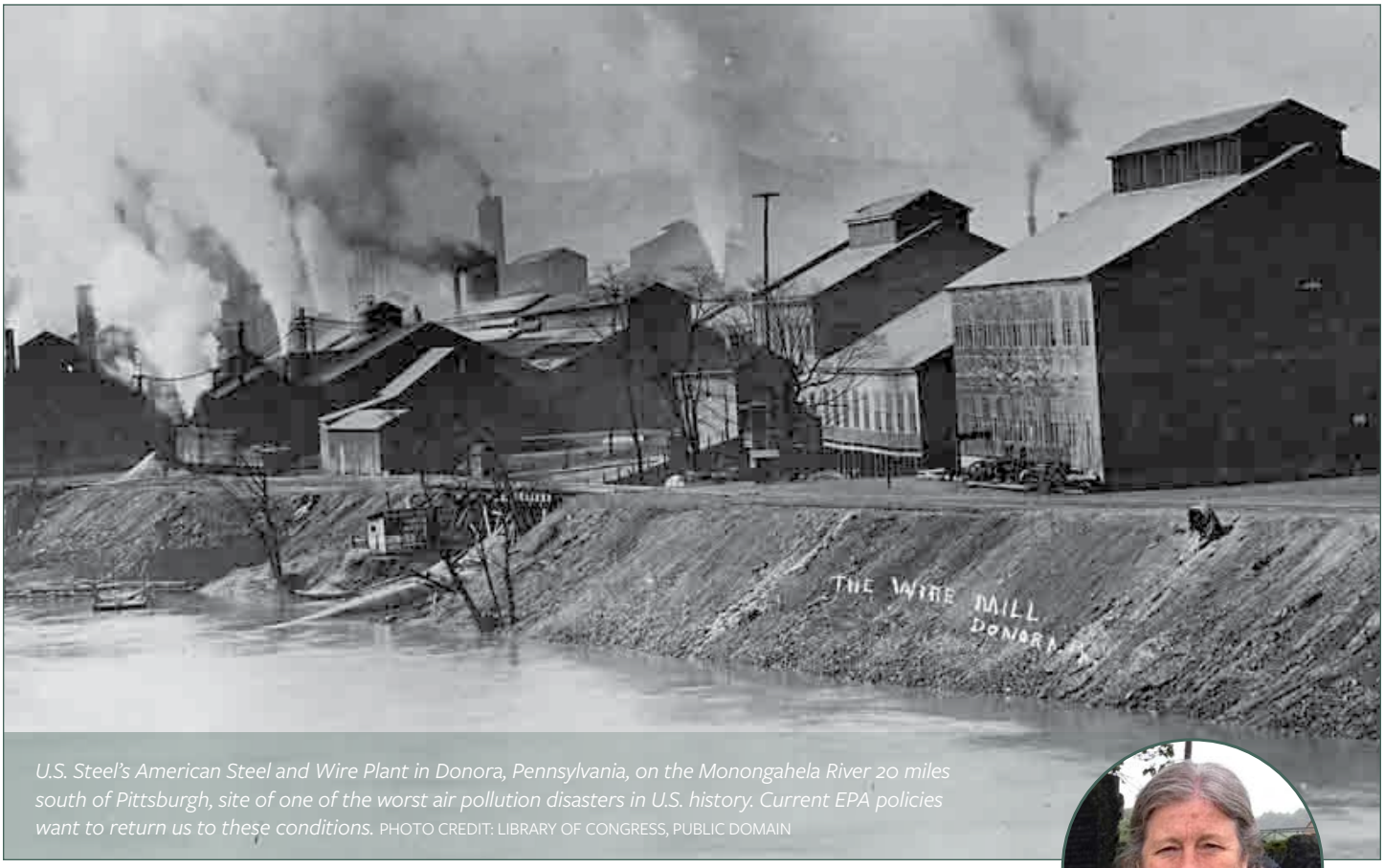
LOSSES:

Mike Mosteller (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 21 (PUTNAM)

Deborah Stiles (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 85, (GRANT-TUCKER)

Elizabeth Sanchez (D)
CHALLENGER DISTRICT 94 (BERKELEY)

Marta Beck (D)
CHALLENGER, DISTRICT 98 (JEFFERSON)



U.S. Steel's American Steel and Wire Plant in Donora, Pennsylvania, on the Monongahela River 20 miles south of Pittsburgh, site of one of the worst air pollution disasters in U.S. history. Current EPA policies want to return us to these conditions. PHOTO CREDIT: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PUBLIC DOMAIN



Sacrificing Human Health for Industry Profits

BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON

One of the worst air pollution disasters in American history occurred in Donora, Pennsylvania, a small mill town on the Monongahela River south of Pittsburgh.

In late October 1948, sulfur dioxide and hydrogen fluoride emissions from U.S. Steel's Donora Zinc Works and its American Steel and Wire Plant were trapped under a layer of cold, foggy air, which formed a smog that hung over the town for five days. Twenty people died and an additional 6,000, in a town of 14,000, suffered respiratory problems. Mortality rates in Donora remained significantly higher than in surrounding towns for the next ten years.

This disaster was one of the key events that led to the creation of the **Clean Air Act of 1970** and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the Nixon administration. Under this legislation, the EPA set National Ambient Air Quality Standards for six common air pollutants: ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and lead.

The **Clean Air Act Amendment of 1990** further expanded federal authority over acid rain, urban air pollution, toxic air emissions, and stratospheric ozone depletion. In 2007, the Supreme Court concluded that the EPA was required to regulate CO2 and other greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions under the Clean Air Act. That led to the **EPA's 2009 GHG Endangerment Finding**, which subsequently served as the legal bedrock for federal climate regulations, supporting rules for vehicles, power plants, and oil and gas standards.

In 2021 the Biden Administration enacted the most far-reaching plan to address climate change in U.S. history, with a goal to eliminate climate pollution from the energy industry by 2035. But on June 30, 2022, the now-conservative Supreme Court, in **West Virginia v. EPA**, restricted the EPA's ability

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Highlights on Student Sierrans

BELOW: *Student Sierra Coalition members at WVU hold the record for the longest-term trail adoption at Coopers Rock State Forest. Here, SSC Secretary Thomas Hayward (left) and sponsor Jim Kotcon work to remove a fallen tree blocking entrance to their trail on October 18.* PHOTO BY GREYSON POOL.

RIGHT: *In October WVU members of the Student Sierra Coalition attended Bridge Day at New River Gorge, WV. Left to right: Aydan Nash (photographer), Audrey Bennett, and Reagan Dorsey.*





INDUSTRY PROFITS | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

to regulate power plant emissions. In response, the EPA created regulations for individual power plants.

Today, the fossil fuel industry has a chokehold on our government. Current EPA Director Lee Zeldin is undoing the regulations that limit toxic emissions and protect human health and the environment. On February 12, 2026, the EPA rescinded the 2009 GHG Endangerment Finding and Motor Vehicle Emission Standards of the Clean Air Act, officially overturning its 2009 scientific and legal determination, saying that it lacked the legal authority to limit emissions.

Then, on September 14, 2026, the EPA repealed most of the standards for GHGs from fossil-fuel-fired power plants. This was intended to facilitate growth of more power plants for data centers, couched as saving ratepayers money. On October 1 and 2, the EPA held a virtual public hearing on the repeal of power plant emissions limits. I didn't hear a single person speak in favor of the repeal. Most spoke of the cost in health care.

West Virginia ranked tenth in the country in total carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel power plants in 2025. The state's coal plants emitted 44.5 million tons of carbon dioxide, while gas plants added nearly two million more tons of pollution. As a result of data center demand for energy, twelve more power plants have been proposed across the state which, if built, would more than double West Virginia's GHG emissions. The Monarch Compute Campus Power Plant in Mason County alone is projected to release almost 46 million tons per year of greenhouse gases, according to the Environmental Integrity Project.

Worsening local air pollution, due to energy policy decisions made by the current administration, will raise healthcare costs in West Virginia by $1 billion, according to an analysis by Energy Innovation, a non-partisan energy and climate policy think tank. Further, we will see increased energy costs, slowed economic growth, and increased air pollution and healthcare costs in West Virginia.

At a National Coal Council meeting in July, Secretary Zeldin boasted about delivering on many of the items on the coal industry's wish list and promised that he would work to see their list completed. **The handouts and regulatory giveaways come as renewable energy continues to outperform coal in the marketplace.**

It is difficult to write an article about air pollution and related health costs without quoting abstract statistics and sources. But Donora was a real place, just down river from Morgantown. Cancers related to air and water pollution are real. In the United States, air pollution from oil, gas, and coal accounts for approximately 91,000 premature deaths annually. More importantly, global warming is real. Undoing pollution standards is not an option.

Preserving Roadless Areas in our Forests



BY DARIA JONES

Sometimes environmental advocacy is most effective when it focuses on a specific issue that has many downstream effects. A recent example of such concentrated power is one million voices submitting comments against the revocation of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This was one of the largest ever nationwide responses to an environmental ruling. Here in West Virginia, 15 groups signed a coalition letter, and 1,665 West Virginians and 370 other individuals signed petitions against the rule—an effort led by WV Rivers and the Sierra Club's WV Chapter.

Nationally, more than 99% of the nearly 1.2 million comments, letters, and signatures submitted opposed rescinding the rule. The public's opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of protecting the roadless areas of our public lands. However, buried in that record was a story the Sierra Club thought needed a closer look. Which businesses, industries, organizations, and government officials were pushing to eliminate protections for some of America's last great undeveloped national forests? What did they stand to gain?

The Club examined the formal positions of 454 organizations and government bodies that weighed in on the proposal and found that just 95 supported repeal. Of those 95 organizations and government bodies, 42 were industry and trade groups, and 32 were counties, cities, towns, or local districts. Together, those two categories accounted for nearly four out of five organizations and government bodies calling for the Roadless Rule's elimination. Here's a sampling of the 42 organizations that wanted the protections gone:

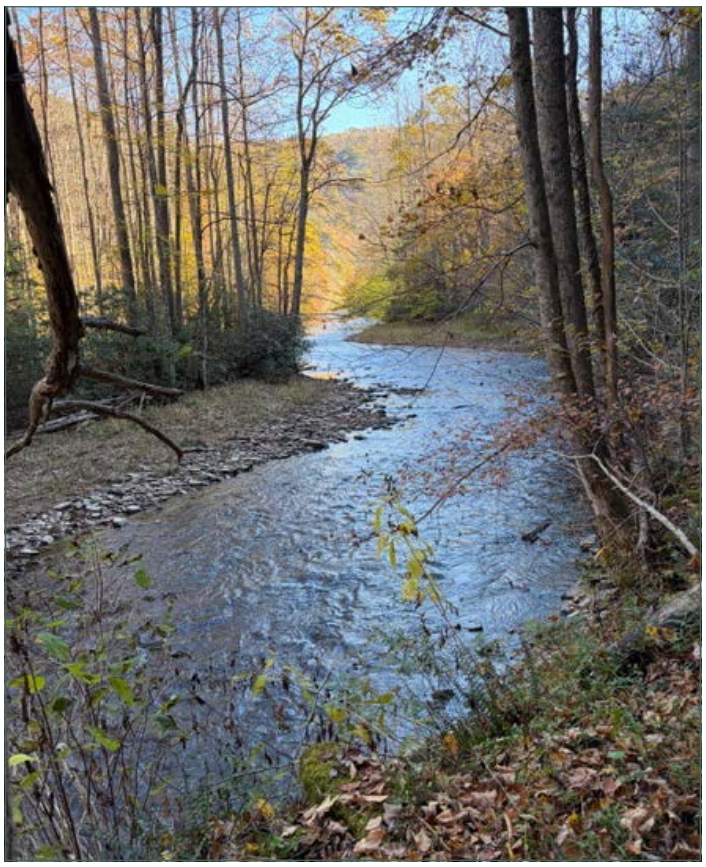
- **TIMBER AND LOGGING**
  American Forest Resource Council, Associated Oregon Loggers, Associated California Loggers, Montana Wood Products Association, and Forest Resources Association
- **MINING AND ENERGY**
  National Mining Association, Alaska Miners Association, Western Energy Alliance, American Exploration & Mining Association, and North Dakota Petroleum Council
- **RANCHING AND GRAZING**
  Oregon Cattleman's Association

Nearly all of these are industries that profit from extractive activities in our forested lands.

The final ruling is expected around April 2027.

The WV Chapter's Public Lands Committee signed on with 15 organizations in commenting against the National Forest Service travel management plan to change certain areas from non-motorized to motorized. The current plan places the burden on any person or entity that wants to change the status of a forest road or trail from non-motorized to motorized to support the basis and necessity for this change. The new proposed rule would instead say that all forest roads and trails should be open to public use and to motorized and off-road vehicles, therefore placing the burden on those trying to preserve a road, trail, or a roadless area from the detrimental effects of access and use by off-road vehicle and other motorized vehicle users. The proposed change further requires an *annual* review of non-motorized areas, which places undue burden on the Forest Service. We want to keep the rule as it is.

Our voices continue to matter, and we invite our members to join us through advocacy, organizing, trail maintenance, member recruitment, or attending our outings, which take us through our forests to see the trees in all their glory.



Glady Fork meanders through Monongahela National Forest, including some backwoods areas threatened by roads if federal regulations are changed.
PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



At the 2026 WVEC annual meeting at Blackwater Lodge, participants broke into groups to draft bills for the WV Legislature. PHOTO BY ANNA N. SAAB.

Drafting Policy Solutions for Our Future



BY ANA N. SAAB
WV ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

So many of us are engaged in our communities in a variety of ways. While we might not think of ourselves as experts on certain policy issues, the truth is that we know more than we think. You could be sitting on solutions your community desperately needs. But, how do you bring that idea to fruition?

The West Virginia Environmental Council (WVEC) recently hosted its 2026 annual meeting at Blackwater Lodge. One of our presenters, Maria Russo of the West Virginia Rivers Coalition and our newest board member, led us through a bill-drafting activity. In small groups, participants discussed community issues they wanted to tackle. Together they developed policy solutions, like a 10-percent tax break for farmers using regenerative agricultural practices.

Anyone can ask a lawmaker to draft or sponsor a bill. Whether by phone, email, snail mail, or in-person, the first step is to reach out to your legislator. Before reaching out, check to see if your idea or issue is being addressed by other legislation. If so, you might choose to reach out in support of that legislation.

When contacting them, explain who you are and why you're reaching out about the issue at hand. It might take a while to hear back. When you do hear back, ask for a meeting so you have more time to speak with them about your concerns and ideas. It is the elected responsibility of your legislator to engage with you and represent your interests.

To prepare for your meeting, conduct some research to make sure you're equipped to answer questions and provide additional information if needed. If you don't know the answer to something, that's okay! Use that as an opportunity to follow up later. The lawmaker will work with legislative staff to draft the bill text. If the bill gets introduced, you can support it by attending public hearings, contacting other lawmakers, sharing information about the bill with people in your community, and even submitting an Op-Ed or letter to the editor in support through your local newspaper.

There are so many ways to participate in democracy beyond voting. If asking a lawmaker to write a bill feels like too much, there are lots of other ways to get involved. Helping others register to vote, working the polls, and even running for office are just a few. Serving your community by getting involved in organizations and contributing to mutual aid strengthens our community, and thus democracy, too.

BUILDING POWER STARTS LOCALLY. Get more involved in your community, get to know your neighbors, and tap into local resistance. Stay informed, get involved, and maintain hope. The future is built now. What are you building?

Love Letters to the Mountain State

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT WEST VIRGINIA?

If you're reading this newsletter, it's probably hard for you to choose, since Sierra Club members love our beautiful state's trails, mountains, forests, rivers, and streams. Our new community writing project is designed to encourage folks to think about their favorite things about the state, but also to engage in the creative act of writing—putting pen to paper and composing their thoughts.



BY LISA DI BARTOLOMEO

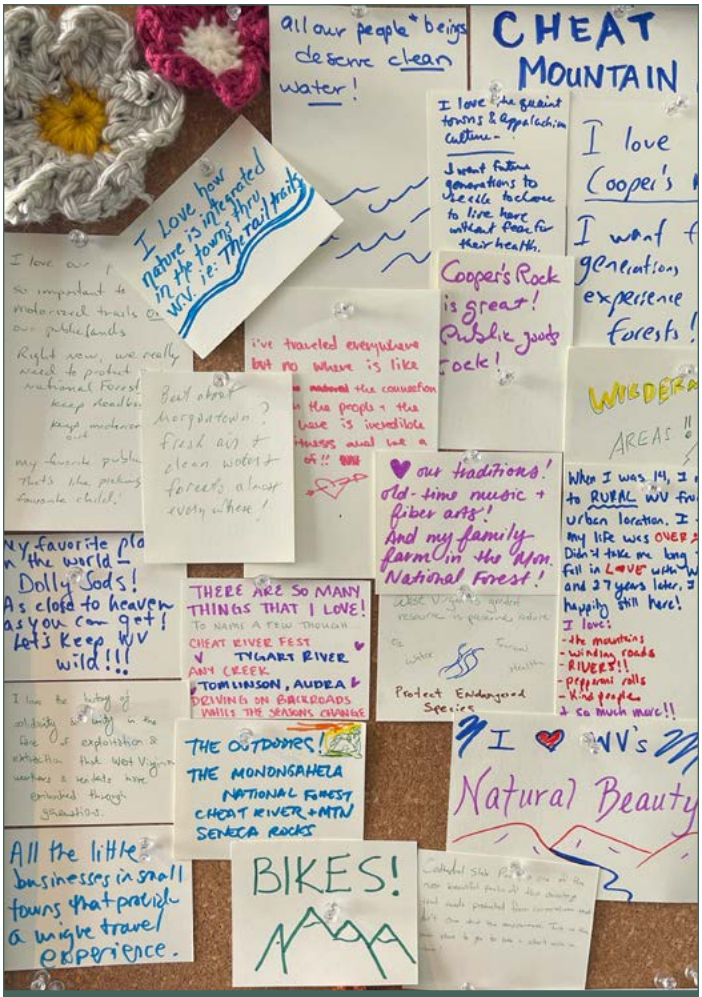
Sierra Club member Dr. Nathalie Singh-Corcoran, Director of the Center for Writing Excellence at West Virginia University, volunteer Sam Baus, and I devised a theme and the design for our community writing board. We wanted something that wouldn't take up too much space but that would welcome folks to engage with environmental questions and contribute their thoughts. Sam did a beautiful job building the board, and it has enjoyed its home at The Grind coffee shop in Morgantown since the beginning of October. (Special thanks go to Tia Easton and The Grind for hosting us!) Many people have taken the time to add their posts to the board, creating a collage of love-letters to our state.

On the first day of the display, Nathalie and I sat in the coffee shop to engage with customers and introduce them to the writing project. We had many great conversations with folks who took a moment to post about their favorite WV spots, and we also asked them to take action. The community writing project wasn't just a fun way to encourage people to handwrite a note of appreciation for our state; it was also designed to coincide with Sierra Club's call to take action against the EPA's proposed rollback of the Endangerment Finding.

Fight back against federal rollbacks of environmental protections

In 2009, the EPA issued the Endangerment Finding, determining that six greenhouse gases (GHGs) threaten public health and welfare. Under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act, the Endangerment Finding legally obliges the federal government to regulate those GHG emissions from vehicles, industrial sources, and power plants. It is one of EPA's most powerful tools to protect our health and our environment.

"Endangerment" can take on many forms: extreme heat, heavy



Sierra Club staff and volunteers created and placed this community writing board at The Grind, a Morgantown coffee shop. It provided a way for customers to share their favorite things about West Virginia and to advocate for some of the state's public lands and resources. PHOTO BY LISA DIBARTOLOMEO.

rainfall, flooding, health impacts, air-quality impacts, impacts on farms and forests, changes to wildlife and ecosystems, and damage to homes, infrastructure, and communities. West Virginians have long been familiar with many of these side effects of development and industrial exploitation, but the Endangerment Finding has helped many communities rebound to health and vitality.

Together, Sierrans across the country contributed tens of thousands of comments to the EPA, telling them to protect us and our communities.

Now the Trump administration wants to roll back the Finding and give free rein to polluters big and small. That would have disastrous consequences for our environment, our health, and our ability to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. The Sierra Club launched a nationwide push to drive comments to the EPA, urging them to retain the Endangerment Finding and protect Americans from the harmful effects of these pollutants. People who wrote notes on our community writing board also took a moment to send their comments to the EPA, often personalizing them with specific references to what they love about West Virginia. Together, Sierrans across the country contributed tens of thousands of comments to the EPA, telling them to protect us and our communities.

Writing for Activism

Now that the comment period has passed, I plan to use the Notes for WV project to encourage an open discussion about climate change, to answer and to pose questions, and to create an ongoing conversation with community members that will, hopefully, spark deeper engagement with the work of the Sierra Club.

The writing project brings together many aspects of care and creativity—a community coming together to handwrite a love letter to our state while also taking the time to advocate for keeping our health and environment safe. It's a fun, creative, and old-school way to share what we love about West Virginia—and why we work to protect it.



If your community would like to host the Notes for WV writing board next, just let me know! lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org

Community Quilt Continues Its Travels

Our WV community quilt continues its travels around the state! In October, the quilt joined the art exhibit in Elkins at the Appalachian Forest Discovery Center, where folks from the renowned Forest Festival got to see the beautiful work of many hands. Next, our quilt will be part of the Mountaineer Week quilt show, November 13-15, at West Virginia University in Morgantown. Where will the quilt go next, and when will it come to a town near you? Stay tuned! If you'd like to help host the quilt in your community or to start a community quilt with your friends, just email me. **lisa.dibartolomeo@sierraclub.org**



HIKING THE ALLEGHENY TRAIL:

Discovering the Backwoods of West Virginia

BY CHRIS CRAIG



PHOTO AT TOP: *Chris climbed to the top of Shaver Mountain on his last day on the Allegheny Trail.* PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

When I turned 60, I embarked on a project to complete the Appalachian Trail in a series of section backpacking adventures. Over the next several years, my life was enriched by this time spent in natural areas from Maine to Georgia, and my health and self-confidence were strengthened by the exertion and independence that long-distance hiking provides.

This year, having just turned 70, I wanted to continue my outdoor adventures while discovering more of my adopted state of West Virginia. How better to do so than to hike the Allegheny Trail (ALT)? The ALT is a 330-mile, yellow-blazed trail running from the Mason-Dixon Line near Bruceton Mills to a point on the Appalachian Trail atop Peters Mountain at the Virginia-Monroe County, WV border. Since two weeks is an optimal time for me to be out on the trail, I decided that I would take on the northern half of the ALT (Pennsylvania Line to Durbin) this past October, leaving the remainder for 2027.

October on the ALT has its challenges as well as rewards. Dense leaf fall can obscure rocks, roots, and mudholes below. While the daytime temperatures are ideal for hiking, the twelve-hour nights are chilly. I could bundle up and stay warm enough in my tent, but brushing frost off my backpack and taking up camp bare-handed in the mornings was sometimes painful. Rewards? At the lower elevations, foliage was at peak color. And while higher up the big trees had lost all their leaves, the evergreen of spruce, fir, and rhododendron filtered wind and sun, and the beech understory provided a constant shimmer of gold. The first couple days had showers and mist, but the remainder of the trip brought only crisp brightness. October also provided even more solitude than I expected. I never encountered another backpacker until my 13th and final night on the trail!



Big Run Falls is one of many waterfalls on the Allegheny Trail. At sunrise, it's one of the prettiest. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

After finishing my two weeks on the ALT, I came away with a greater appreciation of "Wild and Wonderful."

The ALT was developed in the 1970s and 80s by the newly formed West Virginia Scenic Trails Association (WVSTA). Led by Nicolas Lozano and Bob Tabor, Jr., the group blazed basically the present route through much of Monongahela National Forest, Thomas Jefferson National Forest, and private lands in Southeast WV. The northern terminus originally was at Blackwater Falls State Park, but the northern portion of the present trail was later pieced together mainly on roads of Preston and Tucker Counties.

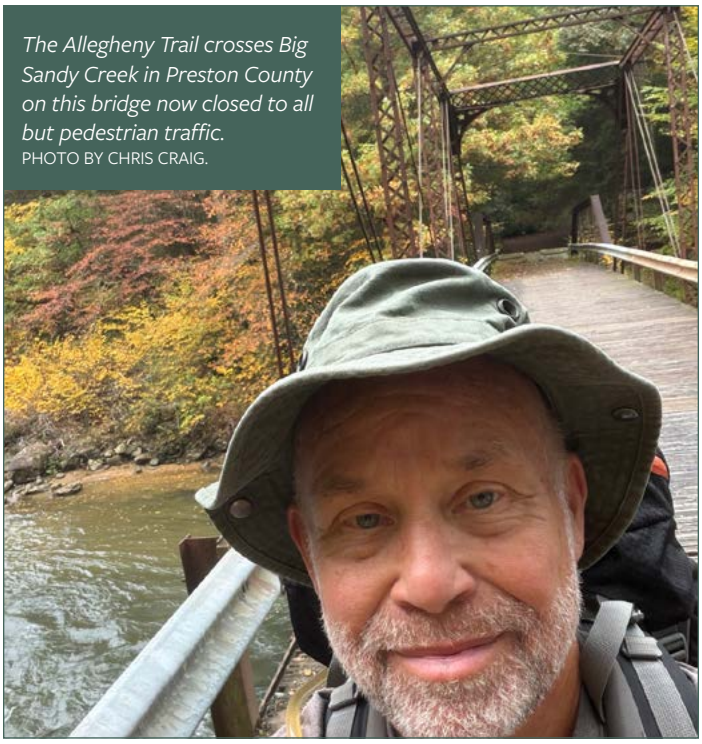
For me, this road walk was physically a good way to get in shape

and increase my familiarity with a new part of the Mountain State. Of course, roads vary. And while I could have done without the two-mile stretch of shoulderless U.S. 50, the bulk of the time I was on gravel roads past farms with expansive views or on rocky backroads that would challenge even ATVs. At one point, one of those roads gave way to a stream that I waded through for about a mile! Rowlesburg and Davis provided good towns for indoor overnights as well as places to mail food drops to myself.

South of Davis, the nature of the adventure changed dramatically. Nearly all the remaining miles were on hiking trails or former railroad grades or logging roads in forests. I followed the beautiful Glady Fork upstream for more than three days, meandered mountain paths through Spruce forests, and forded streams and rivers. Five days without cell service exceeded anything I'd encountered on the Appalachian Trail, though one nice neighbor on my walk through Glady offered her Wi-Fi service for me to check in with family.

The Monongahela National Forest astounded me with the wealth and variety of its plant life. Apart from a few roadsides near towns, I saw few of the non-native flora that have invaded our woodlands along the Blue Ridge. Healthy hemlocks and hardwoods seem remarkable to a hiker accustomed to the fallen ash and oaks farther east. Groundcovers varied from ripe cranberries to miniature forests of fern and clubmoss.

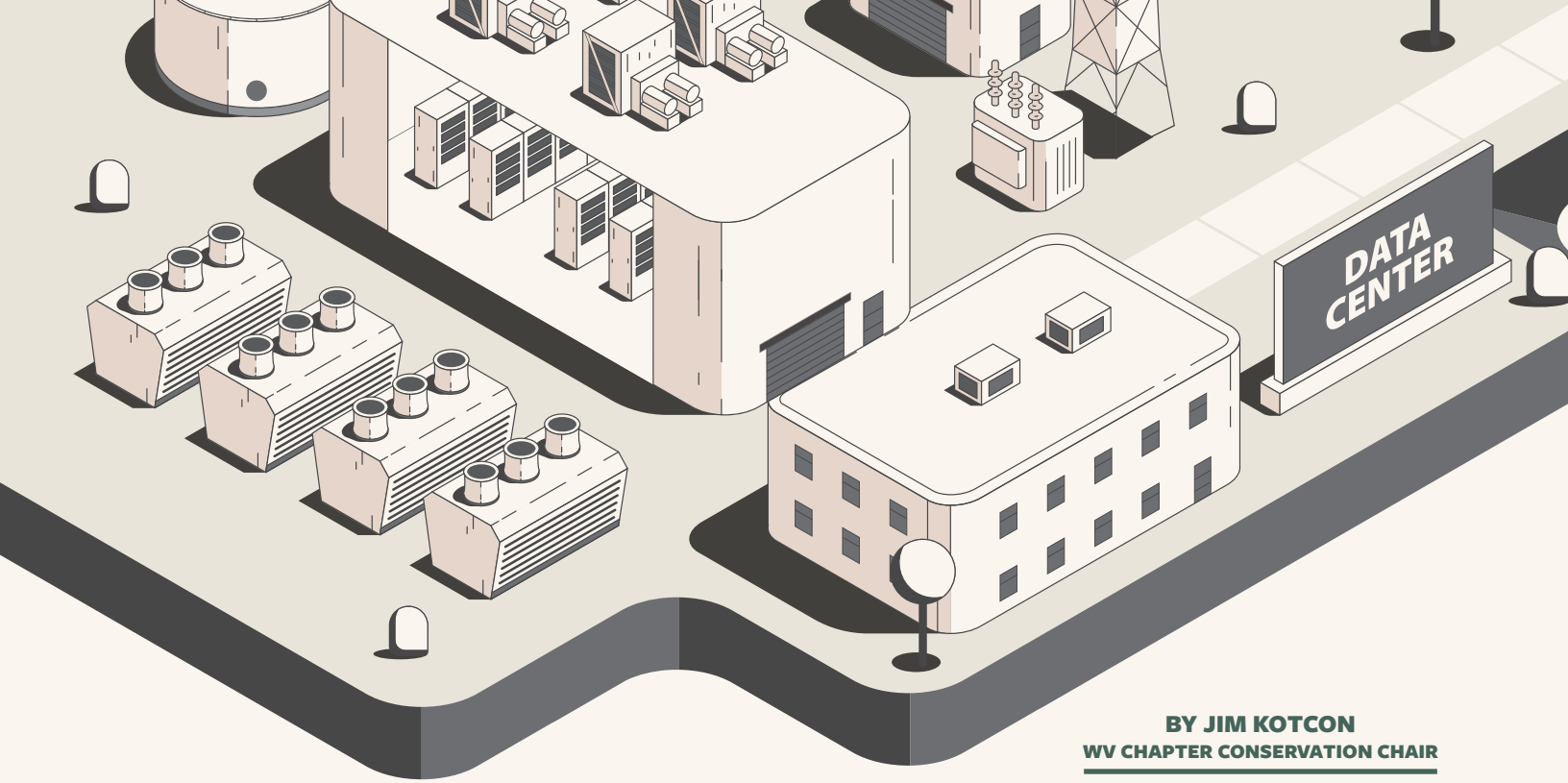
After finishing my two weeks on the ALT, I came away with a greater appreciation of "Wild and Wonderful." I also am thankful for the WVSTA and National Forest Service folks who maintain this corridor and also those 70's-era folks from Sierra Club, WVSTA, and allied organizations who worked so hard to protect and to promote the wildlands of our state. Some of you are, no doubt, still around to read these words. I thank you!



The Allegheny Trail crosses Big Sandy Creek in Preston County on this bridge now closed to all but pedestrian traffic. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



Hand-hewn by WVSTA volunteers: this sturdy bridge over Daniel Creek on the Allegheny Trail. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



BY JIM KOTCON
WV CHAPTER CONSERVATION CHAIR

Data Center Watch

The Sierra Club WV Chapter, with Tucker United and other allies, continues our appeal of the air pollution permit for the Fundamental Data power plant and data center in Tucker County.

In March 2026 the Sierra Club WV Chapter submitted a petition to the state Intermediate Court of Appeals, claiming that the WV Department of Environmental Protection wrongly issued an air permit based on incomplete analysis of the pollution emissions and that they wrongly withheld critical information from the public about the air pollution permit. After that petition was rejected, we are now asking the WV Supreme Court to clarify who has jurisdiction and to hear our appeal based on the merits. As of this writing, the Supreme Court is still considering our petition, but no decision has been issued.

Elsewhere, the Monarch Cloud Campus data center in Mason County has applied for an air pollution permit for a 2.16 GW gas-fired power plant (actually, a series of 864 gas-fired engines) to run their data center. This facility would be one of the largest sources of greenhouse gases in West Virginia and proposes to release almost 300 tons of formaldehyde each year along with other hazardous air pollutants. Mason County is already heavily impacted by several nearby power plants and chemical factories, and the Sierra Club believes that cleaner energy sources should be used.

Facing significant public opposition to his promotion of unbridled data center development throughout the state, Gov. Morrisey recently announced a "Responsible Data Center Development Plan." This is similar to President Trump's "Ratepayer Protection Pledge" announced in March. Both contend that they are protecting communities, but in fact neither provides any meaningful regulation, and both would allow unrestricted data center development. This will almost certainly be an issue in the 2027 WV Legislature and in the next U.S. Congress.



This sign has recently been found in yards and at businesses throughout Tucker County.
COURTESY TUCKER UNITED.

Sierra Club Council Weighs Changes to Club Governance

BY CAROL CULVYHOUSE

As a new member of the Sierra Club's WV Chapter's Executive Committee (ExCom), I volunteered to be our delegate to the Council of Club Leaders (CCL). The purpose of this national body is to build unity within the Sierra Club, represent the perspective of chapters and groups, and provide guidance to the Sierra Club Board of Directors. Because every chapter has a delegate, there is a variety of perspectives expressed at CCL meetings.

At the CCL annual meeting in October, 16 resolutions were presented, and all passed. Resolution topics ranged from regenerative farming to developing a library of Club multimedia resources.

Chapter elections

The Loma Prieta Chapter (CA) proposed two resolutions that dealt with chapter elections. One would give chapters the option to require that members running for ExCom have been members in good standing for at least a year prior to running. The other would allow chapters to require members signing petitions for ExCom candidates to have been Club members for at least 60 days. In recent elections, people had joined Loma Prieta Chapter solely to change the executive committee, in order to endorse candidates favoring housing growth initiatives. Both resolutions passed at CCL, allowing each chapter to implement these requirements if desired.

Outing Safety Policy

A resolution sponsored by the Angeles (CA) and Virginia Chapters requested that the Club suspend implementation of 2026 changes in the Club's Outing Safety Policy and "undertake a transparent, inclusive, and structured review process with meaningful participation from chapters that operate substantial volunteer-led outings." Passing 34-1, this resolution will require re-examination of a controversial tightening of safety policies that were implemented this past February.

Business meetings

The resolution that generated the most discussion at the meeting was proposed by the Tehipite Chapter (CA). It requires greater transparency in business meetings of the Club's Board of Directors as well as in financial support for candidates running for that body. The resolution, which passed 27-6, also will require that the Club notify those making bequests to Chapters of administrative fees. Though this has not affected WV Chapter finances, it has recently been an issue for a number of the larger chapters.

If you are interested in learning more about resolutions or the work of the CCL, or if you are interested in proposing a resolution, contact me, Carol Culvyhouse, at **carebare552@gmail.com.**



Carol Culvyhouse represents the WV Chapter on the Sierra Club's Council of Club Leaders. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAROL CULVYHOUSE.

Outings

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

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. (Carpools are at your own risk.) 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



Among other treasures, Sierrans discovered these colorful mushrooms on an August hike along the Appalachian Trail in Pennsylvania. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

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

DAY HIKE

Friday, January 1, 2027

C&O Canal Towpath, Snyder's Landing to Killiansburg Cave Campsite

Start out 2027 with a Sierra Club tradition and guarantee yourself good luck throughout the coming year! This year we will start out at Snyder's Landing, near Sharpsburg, MD, and hike downstream to Killiansburg Cave and back. It's a quiet and historic section of the Canal, with many caves and old mines. Along the way we'll enjoy great views of the Potomac River and perhaps some birdlife as well. This hike is easy and appropriate for anyone, including families, capable of walking a flat, unpaved trail for a couple hours. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome. There is no charge for the hike, though donations are welcome.

Distance: 3 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 2 hours

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



October brought a hint of fall color and comfortable temperatures during a Sierra Club nature walk at Cool Springs, a nature preserve of Potomac Valley Audubon Society near Charles Town, WV. PHOTO BY ED WHEELESS.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, January 23, 2027

Shepherdstown Exploration, Shepherdstown, WV

Take a winter walk through one of West Virginia's oldest towns to explore some of its history and charms. We will start at Ferry Hill Plantation, overlooking the town from the Maryland shore of the Potomac River and walk through some of Shepherd University, Elmwood Cemetery, the James Rumsey Monument, and the downtown business district before returning to our meeting place. Along the way, we'll stop for a light lunch and perhaps some hot cocoa at one of the popular cafes. This hike will be appropriate for anyone capable of a multi-hour adventure on paved sidewalks. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 4 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3.5 hours

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



Sierrans gathered on a footbridge during a November hike in Sweet Run State Park, Purcellville, VA.
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI

Saturday, January 30, 2027

Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail

This outing is an outstanding opportunity for the beginning cross-county skier. The Blackwater Canyon rail trail offers a near wilderness experience, a gentle downhill grade with several waterfalls, and many scenic views. The canyon has been a long-term campaign for the WV Chapter, and we will learn about the efforts to bring it into public ownership, protect endangered species, address acid mine drainage, and more. If conditions are good we may be able to arrange a shuttle and ski all the way through the canyon. (Carpools are at your own risk.) There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 10 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 6 hours

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



Emerging from the Paw Paw Tunnel, three Sierrans rediscovered daylight on their October ride on the C&O Canal towpath.
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, January 30, 2027

Murphy-Chambers Farm to Lower Town, Harpers Ferry NHP

Hiking along the Shenandoah River, we will see Civil War cannons, earthworks, previous locations of John Brown's Fort, sites of mills, turbines, waterworks, and the U.S. Rifle Factory. There is no charge for this hike, but note that admission to Harpers Ferry NHP requires $20/vehicle or a National Park pass. Carpooling is encouraged.

Distance: 6 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 3.5 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, February 20, 2027

Paw Paw Tunnel Trail, C&O Canal NHP

On this hike we'll view nature, learn about historical spots and enjoy the Canal, all at an easy pace. We will see a nearby cemetery, walk through the tunnel, and get some great views on the hilltop tunnel trail.

Distance: 5 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 3 hours

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



In August Sierrans took a break from their bike ride on the C&O Canal towpath near Fort Frederick State Park, MD.
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, February 27, 2027

Appalachian Trail, Harpers Ferry, WV to Weverton, MD

Join us for the inaugural hike of a series covering all of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in the state of Maryland. From our meeting place in the upper town of Harpers Ferry, we will carpool to the Weverton parking lot at the base of South Mountain and walk a stretch of the C&O towpath that doubles as part of the AT. Crossing into Harpers Ferry, we will ascend to Thomas Jefferson's famous overlook of the gap in the Blue Ridge and end back at our meeting place. Along the way we'll enjoy winter views of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, perhaps some birdlife, and some historical sights. This hike is appropriate for anyone capable of a multi-hour winter hike with short but steep climbs on surfaces ranging from paved to rugged. Because of the carpool, you must be willing to drive or ride with others. (Carpooling is at your own risk.) There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 4.5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 3 hours

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



On a Halloween hike at Berkeley County's Poor House Farm Park, Sierrans discovered the Poor House has turned into Almost Heaven. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.



After a November afternoon hike at Sweet Run State Park in Purcellville, VA, Sierrans met this wise owl, as well as other raptors brought in by the animal rehabilitation organization Secret Garden of Bees and Birds. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

DAY HIKE

Saturday, March 20, 2027

Hollow Brook Trail, Bluemont, VA

This is a short out-and-back hike in Northern Virginia with a waterfall and a climb up to an overview on the summit of Buzzard Hill. There will be moderate inclines with about 250 feet in elevation gain. This hike is open to anyone able to handle a moderate hike on hilly terrain. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 3.8 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 3.5 hours

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

DAY HIKE

Saturday, March 27, 2027

White Oak and Big Ridge Loop, Lost River State Park, WV

This hike combines several trails within the forests of the state park and offers beautiful views from Cranny Crow and Cheeks Rocks. There is a 1,282-foot elevation gain. Parts of the trail may be overgrown, but in early spring it should not be bad. Long pants and sleeves are recommended, however, regardless of the weather. The hike is appropriate for anyone capable of a multi-hour mountainous hike. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

Distance: 5.3 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 3.5 hours

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



In August, Sierrans from West Virginia and Pennsylvania ended eight miles of Appalachian Trail hiking at historic Pine Grove Furnace State Park, PA.
PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



Step carefully! Wet feet don't feel as good on November hikes as they do in August. Here crossing a stream at Sweet Run State Park, Purcellville, VA.
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

The ***Mountain State Sierran*** is published quarterly by the West Virginia Chapter of Sierra Club and distributed to all paid members—in print (when requested) or electronically. $1 of each member's annual dues helps offset the cost of producing this newsletter.

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DEADLINE FOR THE 2027 SPRING ISSUE: FEBRUARY 6, 2027

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

Chapter ExCom Ballots on the Way to Members' Mailboxes

BY CANDICE ELLIOTT



As the Sierra Club's West Virginia Chapter conducts its annual year-end election to fill expiring seats on our Executive Committee (ExCom), all WV members should be on the lookout for their official ballots. Likely to be printed on yellow paper to stand out from the rest of your holiday mail, ballots will be mailed to members in good standing during the first week of December and must be received back by January 7, 2027.

In past years, the only information members had for making their choices was each candidate's short personal statement included on the ballot. We hope to expand the material provided this year by posting longer statements and additional information on our Chapter website. When voting members receive their paper ballots in the mail, they can scan the QR code or use the link provided on the ballot to see additional details about each candidate and so make more informed choices. Every member's vote has the potential to affect the outcome of this election, so please be thoughtful as you choose the candidates you think will best serve the chapter.

Every member's vote has the potential to affect the outcome of this election

In this election cycle, four of the seven at-large seats on West Virginia's Chapter ExCom are up for renewal. While the slate of candidates is still being finalized, each person on the ballot has expressed a willingness to put in the time to help keep the chapter running smoothly during their two-year term. Winners will take office at the first ExCom meeting of the new year, in January.

As the primary decision-making body for the Chapter, the ExCom is responsible for approving policies, appointments, and budgets. It meets, either virtually or in person at various locations around the state, to conduct business at least five times a year. All meetings are open to anyone interested in attending.

Sierra Club
West Virginia Chapter
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sierraclub.org/west-virginia

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Winter 2026

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

You're Invited to the Next WV Chapter ExCom Meeting

Get involved. Meet chapter leaders.
Learn about issues and opportunities.

The WV Chapter Executive Committee (ExCom) will meet in January at a date and time still to be determined. Watch the next issue of our online newsletter *Currents* for updates or contact Bill Price at bill.price2011@gmail.com.

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