Persistance Pays Off in Coal Ash Permit Delays

Petra and John Wood

In the July/August Sierran, you read about the massive inputs of coal combustion waste (aka, fly ash) on minelands around Morgantown. On about 3,500 acres in three watersheds, up to 10,000 tons/acre — amounting to a 10-foot thick layer of coal ash over the entire surface — have been added during reclamation as a supposed beneficial use to reduce acid mine drainage (AMD). There is abundant evidence, however, that it does not necessarily reduce AMD. At the same time, it does reduce air quality and especially water quality because toxic metals and total dissolved solids (TDS) leach from fly ash dumped in minifills.

Several new mine permits proposing to dump ash are in the works, including the New Hill West and Coresco permits.

Status of New Hill West permit

When the National Pollution Elimination Discharge System (NPDES) permit was approved for this 225-acre mine in 2010, Sierra Club and Appalachian Mountain Advocates challenged the permit in an appeal before the WV Environmental Quality Board (EQB). To prevent degradation of water quality in Scott’s Run before the hearing could be held, a stay on the permit was requested and granted in November 2010.

A 4-day EQB hearing in early December 2010, featured expert witnesses who presented scientific evidence that high TDS, conductivity, and sulfates can impair aquatic life, which is a violation of the Clean Water Act and of the WV Narrative Water Quality Standards (WQS). The WQS specifically state that NPDES Permit limits must ensure compliance against discharges of “… materials in concentrations which are harmful … to … aquatic life” (47 C.S.R. § 2-3.2.e) or that cause “significant adverse impact to the … biological components of aquatic ecosystems …” (47 C.S.R. § 2-3.2.i).

In March 2011, the 5-member EQB unanimously found that DEP’s issuance of the permit was unlawful, that they failed to include enforceable effluent limits sufficient to ensure protection of water quality standards, and that discharges from the New Hill West surface mine have the reasonable potential to cause or contribute to degraded water quality.

The EQB remanded the permit back to DEP to set appropriate and enforceable limits for conductivity, sulfate, total dissolved solids, manganese, and selenium.

But even though the EQB decision was based on scientific evidence and the law, the WVDEP and the mining company appealed the decision to circuit court. Interestingly, the circuit court did not actually make a ruling on this appeal. Instead, in late September 2011, Judge Stucky remanded the case back to EQB with the following statement, “The EQB shall provide written supplemental findings detailing a reasoned and articulate decision in the Final Order. Additionally, these findings should include guidance to calculate threshold values for regulating conductivity, TDS, and sulfate.”

In the meantime, the mining company filed an appeal to the EQB to lift the stay on the permit so that mining can commence. Additionally, their lawyers argue that because the company is losing $2 million a month in revenue, Sierra Club should have to post bond in this amount (see http://blogs.wvgazette.com/coaltattoo/2011/10/11/judge-sends-patriot-permit-back-to-eqb/).

At this time, the EQB has not made a final ruling on the status of the bond and has asked the lawyers for all parties to provide input on how to proceed with Judge Stucky’s order. Apparently, this is an unusual ruling and the EQB is “feeling its way” on how to proceed. It does appear that the issuance of a valid NPDES permit for this mine will be delayed.

Status of Coresco permits

Two permits are in play at sites near Maidsville. One is an existing 140-acre ash dump. An application for renewal of this permit is pending even though there is evidence that the site is degrading water quality and is contributing to air pollution problems.

A new 338-acre Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) mine permit application is pending, even though the application specifically states that there will be NO coal mining. The application proposes to dump about 86 million tons of fly ash over 25-30 years, which will result in an unlined and uncovered ash pile 500 feet thick. This site, if permitted, will simply be a way for area power plants to dump their waste for free rather than have to pay for liners and treatment of run-off that would keep toxic metals and TDS out of our surface and ground water.

Sierra Club members and local residents requested a public meeting with WVDEP to allow public input on this permit application. The meeting, held on Monday, Oct 17, was attended by about 20 citizens, Delegates Fleischauer and Manypenny, and several media representatives. The over-riding theme of comments from attendees was that these sites are fly ash dumps that degrade our environment, affect human health, and should not be permitted under SMCRA. Sierra Club chair Jim Sconyers released the news that the Sierra Club, the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, and the Fort Martin Community Association filed notice of intent to sue Coresco and affiliated company and property owner Mepco for violations of the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.
Marcellus Legislation Grinds Gears Moving Forward

Chuck Wyrostok

The road to meaningful Marcellus drilling regulation is rife with potholes and ruts, much like the local roads torn up by the hundreds of heavy trucks moving rigs, water, chemicals and sand to and from drilling sites across West Virginia.

Here’s a roadmap. The Marcellus Select Committee is working with a bill that passed the State Senate this past regular session but died in the House of Delegates. It is considering a series of more than twenty amendments so that a consensus can be reached for a new bill in the next regular session or a possible special session before the end of this year.

At meetings on Oct. 12 &13, the ten Delegates and Senators — a mix of citizen advocates and obstructionists, some of whom want realistic guards in the law and others who think the government should function as a chamber of commerce — sparred politely. There are the minions of industry who would just as soon say there is risk to everything, so let ‘er rip. They wouldn’t mind an industrialized countryside spiking local businesses. And then there are people of conscience.

Prior to October, the Committee had managed to pass more than twenty amendments, many of them quite good (see http://www.legis.state.wv.us/committees/interims/committee.cfm?abb=Marcellus). Currently, they have expanded the buffer zone between Marcellus shale wells and homes, livestock, and drinking water from 200 feet to 625 feet. Other provisions keep drilling wells 250 feet from drinking wells or springs, 1,000 feet from public water supply intake points and 300 feet from a recognized trout stream. The committee also agreed to allow the DEP secretary to increase this spacing if scientific evidence shows unacceptable health risks to residents of the nearby house. Delgatie Barbara Evans Fleischauer proposed that amendment while also advocating, without success, for larger buffers.

Advocates stood their ground on the $10,000 drilling application fee (even though DEP head Randy Huffman gave up yardage by reducing his request to $5,000), compromized on water protection and casing requirements, and put off final discussion of surface-use agreements.

The committee heard from Marion County resident Casey Griffith, who said the dream house he built with his wife has been ruined by a well site about 200 feet away. Around-the-clock noise, dust churned up by well construction, and waste gas burned off at the site are among his family’s concerns, he said (see related story, this page).

In 2009, their hollow turned into an industrial zone. On the hill next to and just above their home is a Marcellus well pad permitted for six wells. At the front edge of their yard on what once was field, is a fresh-water impoundment and what will be a gravedled staging area for heavy equipment.

“‘There’s just no escape,’” Stacie said. “You just can’t stand to view it every day. It’s every day, it’s all day. It’s every conversation, it’s every phone call, it’s every picture, it’s every videotape. It just consumes you.”

The Legislation’s Joint Select Committee on Marcellus Shale is preparing to meet twice this week during interims. An amendment it will debate is well spacing. The amendment proposes, among other things, that no well pad be located within 1,000 feet of an occupied dwelling.

The Griffiths’ story illustrates why this is being debated. State code now requires wells — not pads — to be 200 feet from dwellings. The one completed well on the pad above the Griffiths — called the Donna pad for the landowner who recently sold the site to Waco — meets that requirement.

But some rough work with a tape measure — what could be accomplished without trespassing — suggests the pad’s edge is closer to 100 feet from the Griffiths’ home.

Stacie Griffith: ‘This is all I get done’

Sometimes, the traffic and noise and construction carry on from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Other times, it’s 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. When drilling begins shortly, it will be 24/7 as Waco Oil & Gas drills a number of vertical holes. Then there will be a short break, as bigger equipment comes in to drill the horizontal legs.

Every day, Stacie, a middle school physical-education teacher, hoses the dust off their porch. Every day, they meet Marcellus rigs on the road that’s not quite two lanes wide. Although the construction rigs are supposed to yield, they often don’t. So the Griffiths have to stop or pull off into the ditch or back up hundreds of feet to a wide spot.

One recent day, a rig refused to move over and destroyed the $450 mirror on Stacie’s pickup. She showed a letter from Waco’s insurance company refusing to pay for the damages. They are thankful that Waco’s partner in the operation, Charleston-based Energy Corporation of America, has agreed to replace the mirror.

“We are keeping those interested abreast of what’s being done (or not done) at the Capitol by email because we want our voices to be heard as soon as they are needed. If you are not yet signed up, we need you. Please send an email to outreach@marcellus-wv.com to join the push. You may call members of the Select Committee on Marcellus toll-free at 877-565-3447. Senator Facemire is Co-Chair along with Senators Facemyer, Klimpa, Palumbo and Snyder. Delegate Manchin is Co-Chair along with Delegates Fleischauer, Anderson, Ireland and Tom Campbell. Tell them you want the strongest possible regulations and nothing less.

“Encourage your County Commissioners to take the Wetzel County Marcellus drilling tour, provided by folks there whose lives have been profoundly affected by the drilling rush. Post your Marcellus ad campaign at www.keepWVbeautiful.com .

A few choice excerpts from the mid-October meetings:

Marion County resident Casey Griffith testified, “I want to encourage you guys to make a smart decision on behalf of your constituents,” urging them to approve a 1,000-foot buffer zone. “My agenda is to protect other residents from what my wife and I have had to tolerate for two years.” A gas company drilled a well 120 feet from the dream home he and his wife built and the family has suffered disruption and turmoil since 2009.

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“She’s never a bird,” she said. “You don’t hear birds.”

And Casey talk about their daughter getting worn down and sick from lost sleep. The public road by their house gets blocked by trucks and equipment, meaning it would be hard for them to leave in an emergency, or for emergency vehicles to get in. They won’t have their daughter’s third birthday party at their house, because no one will be able to get in.

Some weekends, they just pack up and leave to get away.

“The Griffiths’ signed a mineral lease with Waco in order to recoup some of the financial losses they suffered — including a $2,000 artificial pond that kept filling with well pad runoff.

Waco crews recently broke their water line, for the second time. Waco called and advised them to blow out their lines, but Stacie said there’s probably mud in their water heater, which they’ll have to replace — at their own expense.

According to Department of Environmental Protection records, Waco has one completed well on the pad and permits for five more. The Dominion Post called Waco on Friday to get details on its plans but Waco’s land department manager referred all questions to the company vice president or operations manager, who were both out of the office.

Lawmakers look to tweak bill

The Marcellus Committee is working to amend a draft regulatory bill, based on failed Senate Bill 424, in preparation for a possible special session in November. This amendment, presented by the five House members, also deals with well pad distances from water wells and springs, and livestock shelters.

Some members have suggested a shorter distance, maybe 700 feet.

The Griffiths would prefer a mile. Casey admits that’s not realistic. But he suggests contacting gas industry executives and seeing how many have wells 200 feet from their doors. The word “unreasonable” crops up several times.

“I challenge any of them to come to my home during active operations and look me straight in the face and say, ‘Yeah, it’s OK,’” he said. “If you’re going to put your child down for a nap, or bedtime, 200 feet is too unreasonable.”

Multiacre, multi-well Marcellus operations are the same as the old, small-footprint vertical wells that also dot the Plum Run area.

Amendment, continued on p. 3
Delegate Woody Ireland, R-Ritchie, voiced his impatience with the delays the committee has faced. ‘We need to set things and get on down the way. We have piddled around, if you will, with this whole affair for a number of months now. ... Let’s get on down the road.” He expressed frustration that neither the DEP nor the industry has any hard data regarding noise, volatile organic compounds, or dust and air pollution. “We’re trying to deal with an issue we don’t know anything about.”

DEP Secretary Randy Huffman balked at a legislative rule proposal, saying his staff lacks the experts on health issues. Committee co-chair Delegate Tim Manchin, D-Marion, corrected Huffman, pointing out that code requires the DEP to address health issues. And Delegate Bill Anderson, R-Wood, added that Huffman could use permit fee increases to hire or contract someone for the job.

Del. Mike Manypenny, D-Taylor, who sat in on the committee meetings, said, “I think one of the things we really need to do to correct this problem is to require best management practices,” with closed-loop systems to avoid dispersal of chemicals, fumes, dust and particulate matter.

Sen. Karen Facemyer, R-Jackson, opposed the drilling application fee increase. “What is the rush on this?” she asked. The bill still has to go through both chambers at a special session. “If we can get by with a couple hundred or a couple thousand dollar fee, as opposed to $10,000, why not do that? Why are we always assuming that the industry is the bad guy? We’re trying to make this state a business-friendly state.”

Sen. Orphy Kempa, D-Ohio, who devised the amendment up for reconsideration, opposed Facemyer. “The rush is, this has been going on for two years, almost three. Constituents call. There’s no comfort level that the environment’s being protected correctly. You get a sense of urgency. I don’t think two years and three years is rushing anything.”

Drillers are working the Northern Panhandle, he said. “They’re up there going guns ablaze. There’s money to be made in this. This $35,000 permit for six wells on a site isn’t going to run the industry out of the Northern Panhandle, but it will give the people I’ve been sent down here to represent a sense of security and sense of knowing that they’re being protected.”

The committee approved the higher fees by a vote of 8 to 1, with only Facemyer voting against.

Amendment, continued from p. 2

“This has been going on for 2 1/2 years. It’s a whole different beast,” Casey said. “It has to be a minimum of 1,000 feet. This is just unreasonable. One thousand feet is by no means unreasonable on either side.”

Rick Humphreys, the Griffiths’ friend, neighbor and distant relative by marriage, is part of the conversation. His home sits farther up the road, and just 30 feet off the road. Every day, he hears the rigs’ jake brakes as they pass.

When he retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel — he had a choice of settling here or on 60 acres he owns near Clarksburg. He picked here. “I did it for the ambience.”

Now he wonders why. But he won’t move. People always ask him about moving, he said.

“If you don’t like it so much, why don’t you move,” they ask. “Why should I have to move? I was here first. It belongs to me.”

Humphreys fumes over the state of property rights. West Virginia’s surface rights are severed from the mineral rights, and mineral owners are allowed reasonable access to the surface owner’s land to develop their minerals.

“A police officer can’t enter your home without a warrant, but a company can drive through your yard with impunity,” he said. Of course, the companies are just doing what’s legal. “I’m more angry at the politicians who are responsible to do something and won’t. ... We shouldn’t have to suffer like this, to live in a place we worked for and bought.”

Barring some pressing health concern that could arise, Stacie and Casey don’t want to move, either.

Stacie said: “There’s sentimental value here. We’d never be able to replace it.”

Casey said: “People don’t understand the sentimental value. It’s not going to happen.”

Stacie said: “How do you put a value on sentimental things? I don’t want to put a value on it. I don’t want to sell it.”

Nominations Needed for December ExCom Elections

The Monongahela Group is made up of about 400 members who live in Monongalia, Marion, Preston, Taylor, and Harrison counties. The Executive Committee (ExCom) consists of five members from the Group elected to two-year terms. Three positions are up for election this December, with Rodger Dotson and Gwen Jones continuing their terms.

According to our ByLaws, and to introduce new blood into the group, we need a total of at least five candidates to make it an official ballot. The candidates must agree to serve if elected, and must be members of the Sierra Club.

The Group ExCom meets about four times per year to discuss conservation issues and plan program meetings. They also make decisions about the direction of the group and authorize spending from our budget. We usually have evening meetings in the Morgantown area, but could adjust that to accommodate a member who lived farther away.

If you or someone you know would make a good candidate, please send your nomination and a brief statement (about 100 words) explaining why you would be a good candidate to: Sally Wills, sallywills@yahoo.com or 304-379-7587 before November 15.

Nominations are also needed for the Chapter ExCom and may be sent to: Karen Grubb, karen.grubb@fairmontstate.edu or 304-367-4878.
Report on CCL Meeting in San Francisco

Gary Nelson, WV Chapter Delegate

Here are highlights from the Sept 21-24 Meeting in San Francisco of the Council Club Leaders (CCL), at which I represented West Virginia.

Two resolutions important to WV passed

The first resolution by WV to allow chapters to ban hydrofracking passed with no amendments, 34 to 22. WV co-sponsored the resolution. NY delegates say the resolution will pass their chapter and be approved also by their state government, putting gas drilling on hold for NY. We should do the same.

The second resolution by TX passed, 56 to 4, with two amendments, allowing more funds to study gas hydrofracking.

Other Resolutions

• A resolution to study the adverse effects of global population increases passed.
• A resolution to elevate the anti-nuclear program passed.
• A resolution requiring donors of free phone books to pick up used phone books passed.
• A resolution to end the Sierra clean business program failed to pass, 48 to 10. (WV voted to end the program.)
• A resolution to have the club review its policy on civil disobedience passed, 35 to 21.

Sierra Club Stands in Solidarity with Occupy Wall Street Protests

Sarah Hodgdon, Conservation Director, and Dave Scott, Vice President for Conservation

For the past several weeks Occupy Wall Street protesters have peacefully held vigil in support of a broad vision for financial, political, and environmental reform in America. From this creative hub of activity, a diverse group of students, members of labor unions, environmentalists, and concerned citizens have helped this grassroots protest spread to more than 1,400 events nationwide. Many Sierra Club staff and volunteer leaders have participated in and/or lent support to these demonstrations standing up for the end to corporate greed. The demands and values of the protesters are very much in line with Sierra Club’s strategic priority of confronting the power of the coal and oil industries.

Sierra Club affirms its support for the exercise of peaceful protest and demonstration as the highest form of citizen engagement in a vibrant democracy. In a democratic process, peaceful protest and demonstration are among the highest form of citizen engagement. In our work around the country, we have seen first-hand how international coal and oil companies have wrecked this grassroots protest are very much in line with Sierra Club’s strategic priority of confronting the power of the coal and oil industries.

Tar Sands a Bad Idea

Tar sands — even the name is nasty, as is its namesake. The western Canadian tar sands are the latest, and largest, “play” in world energy exploitation. In short, vast amounts of fossil fuel, second only to the Saudi oil pools, are bound up in thick, viscous gooey sand. It is “cooked” in place to enable it to be piped out. Then it is proposed that the goo will be piped across the American heartland to refineries in Texas, from where it would be exported.

The icon of the tar sands is known as the Keystone XL Pipeline. This pipeline would cross many of America’s most outstanding rivers — the Yellowstone, for example — and aquifers such as the Ogallala, an unparalleled source of irrigation and drinking water. The risks from tar sand spills are obvious and ominous.

The dirty tar sands, along with the energy intensive processes required to extract and refine them, mean that this material will generate much more greenhouse gas than ordinary oil. But that’s only part of the problem.

Bill McKibben, climate crusader, and James Hansen, leading NASA climate scientist, put it this way.

McKibben: “The Keystone Pipeline would also be a fifteen-thousand-mile fuse to the biggest carbon bomb on the continent, a way to make it easier and faster to trigger the final overheating of our planet, the one place to which we are all indigenous.”
Six Receive “Unsung Heroes” Award

Heroes come in many forms. Unsung heroes often don’t deliberately choose their calling, but rather are chosen by their circumstances. This year’s awardees were taken from a pool of candidates who are currently Sierra Club members and who have never previously received a State Chapter award.

Kevin Foose, a tireless volunteer, has been a tour de force in increasing our membership and maintains a Facebook page for the Chapter which now boasts over 1,100 people. He continues to work toward establishing a Sierra Club group in Charleston and has been invaluable in our green initiative. As a member of the Energy Committee and as an electrician, he is constantly pushing for renewable sources of electricity. As a relatively new volunteer with our Chapter, Kevin hit the ground running and hasn’t stopped yet.

Tom Shipley literally gave up a business in Florida to come back home to vigorously fight a plan for building a sewage facility right over a karst field along Shavers Fork near his family homestead. Using almost all his life savings, he initiated a campaign that after nearly two years seems to be involved with every issue imaginable, and zero percent-pollution mentality is a timely message when you consider the present threats from Marcellus Shale drilling in our state.

Duane Nichols seems to be involved with every issue imaginable, always willing to lend his expertise for the benefit of the environment. He has helped form and has been active on citizens’ committees ranging from Citizens for Alternatives to Longview Power, now the Mon Valley Clean Air Coalition, to the Cheat Lake Environment and Recreation Association (CLEAR). He is active on the WVSC Energy Committee and is now the co-chair of the WV/PA Water Compact, which has been very busy with a multitude of watershed issues that beset our state. He even blogs occasionally on Marcellus shale issues.

As a retired Chemical Engineer he has an impeccable scientific approach to issues. It’s hard to even begin to calculate how much Duane has accomplished, or how much he continues to do. While songs haven’t been written about Duane yet, we recognize him for his heroic deeds.

Regina Hendrix may seem like a mother hen, providing comfort to everyone she meets, but she is a force to be reckoned with when it comes to Mountain Top Removal issues. She made her voice heard as an active lobbyist while living in Charleston, and maintains her close ties with leaders in the MTR community. Regina was a key organizer of the recent march commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain. Regina’s passion for doing what is right for our ecosystem makes her an effective voice for the mountains and a significant hero in our state.

Petra and John Wood have been extremely active for a number of years in fighting the Coresco fly ash impoundment that directly impacts the air and water near their home (see page 1 for details of their struggle). Their biggest victory to date has been the delay of the New Hill West Surface mining permit; however, WVDEP is now challenging this. The job of hero for the environment never really ends; their battle is ongoing and their persistence, undaunted. They truly deserve to be included in the songs of heroes of the Mountain State.

Mountain View Solar & Wind, based in Berkeley Springs, WV, is currently offering a price break to Mountain State Sierrans and others who sign a contract with them before January 31, 2012. All those participating will be included in a Group Purchase Program to take advantage of bulk ordering. The more panels purchased during this program, the better the collective price will be for those who are registered. For more details on the Group Purchase Program, please contact Michelle Liefke at 240-818-8333 or 877-96-SOLAR, or via e-mail at: michelle@mtvsolar.com. More info about the company can be found at their website, www.mtvsolar.com.

SierraFest 2011 in a Nutshell

SierraFest 2011, held Sept 30-Oct 2 at Camp Caesar in Cowen, Webster County.

Friday Evening

Ed Wiley gave a moving talk about his years-long quest for justice at Marsh Fork Elementary School, where his granddaughter and other children got sick from nearby coal plant operations and lived in the shadow of a potential disaster from a gigantic coal sludge pond poisoning directly over the school. After Ed’s talk, we viewed the film On Coal River, which tells Ed’s ultimately successful story.

Saturday

We started the day with a fun musical-chairs type icebreaker that got people up, talking, and learning about each other! Our kick-off speaker, Deb Nardone, Sierra Club Natural Gas Reform Campaign Director, brought us up to date on national Sierra Club’s gas campaign and energy policy, while we brought her up to date on the West Virginia Chapter’s work on gas here. Deb is relatively new to national staff, and it was a nice opportunity to get to know her.

Delegated Barbara Evans Fleischauer briefed us on the progress of the Marcellus shale gas bill and Select Committee. She especially focused on the amendments. Twenty-two amendments strengthening the bill had been passed at that point, with four more pending.

Artist Ann Payne shared her very original art project memorializing the species wiped out at Dunkard Creek. Project artists created ninety varied and creative works, each illustrating one of the exterminated species.

Outings Chair Dan Soeder trained new leaders for our statewide outings program. Welcome, new leaders! Watch for more great outings.

Tim Guillifofe of the national Sierra Club Water Sentinels program told us all about this effective grassroots volunteer water monitoring program. With training and simple equipment, volunteers can provide vital information about water quality in areas of interest.

After lunch, attendees chose one of several short sessions to attend. Dan Soeder went over the best outdoor gear to have for different types of outings. Mike Costello of the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition shared ambitious plans for wilderness and other protective designations for our outstanding public wildlands. Beth Little briefed us on the latest developments on Marcellus Shale issues.

As Outings Chair, Jonathan Rosenbaum, gave moving testimonials while presenting the annual West Virginia Sierra Club awards to the hugely deserving recipients.

After a delicious and filling dinner, we congregated to hear our Keynote speaker, archeologist Harvard Ayers, give a fascinating account of the years-long battle to preserve famous (infamous?) Blair Mountain, site of the pivotal Battle of Blair Mountain that strove to protect coal miner rights in 1921.

Award-singer-songwriter Kate Long shared her talents with us between speakers. Heartbreak, inspiring, or funny; a capella or with guitar or autoharp, Kate sang her beautiful and us singing along.

During the VI-C-T-O-R-Y Session, we asked folks to share important recent victories.

Patience Wait and Keryn Newman, The PATH slayers gave a sometimes hilarious account of their long and successful battle to kill the unneeded and ill-conceived PATH power line.

Pam Nixon, WVDEP Environmental Advocate, told the story of the MTR (that killed thousands at Bhopal) in Charleston and the long struggle to get this potentially catastrophic poison out of West Virginia.

Petra and John Wood recounted their ongoing efforts to keep toxic coal ash out of their community in northern West Virginia.

Derek Teaney of Appalachian Mountain Advocates shared the inside story of the many victories his group has won representing Sierra Club on Mountaintop Removal and other coal mine issues.

Sunday

Silent Auction Wrap-up: The auction was a lot of fun, as well as a financial success. Folks are now eating, wearing, carrying, sleeping in, and paddling their auction prizes!
Changing of the Leaves Festival on Larry Gibson’s property. As an individual attending this event, I can honestly say it was eye-opening. We all agreed the scale of mountaintop removal mining does not become realistic until it is seen right before your eyes. Larry Gibson was a great speaker and we enjoyed the tour he led around his property. After attending this event, we all had new ideas to bring to the club meetings and we are excited to see the results of our future actions throughout the school year.

We expect to hold several events throughout the year and involve our group in the fights against Marcellus Shale Drilling and Mountaintop Removal Mining. Stay tuned for more updates!

Several of us were chatting recently at SierraFest about our favorite hikes. Everyone who has done some outdoor activities has collected many experiences that are mundane, some that are interesting, and a few that are spectacular. The spectacular ones stay with you for a long time, and can be retrieved like a favorite old book and savored in a quiet moment.

These thoughts were triggered by Pam Peitz remarking that she and a friend were planning an autumn hike on Mount Washington in the Presidential Range in New Hampshire. This happens to be one of my favorites. I hiked this area with my brother about ten years ago—we met up in the Appalachian Mountain Club lodge at Pinkham Notch, and left the next morning to hike to the top of the mountain. My late brother Jim had been a pretty rigorous hiker, doing a lot of strenuous trails out west and in Alaska, many of them solo. He bragged about going from the south rim of the Grand Canyon down to the Colorado River and back in one day, waltzing right past the trail sign posted by the National Park Service, which states that this is NOT considered a reasonable day hike. Not by most people, anyway.

So we ended up following a group of goody French Canadians who were merely singing folk songs in undecipherable, archaic French as they sauntered out of the AMC lodge and slogged uphill to Tuckerman Ravine. We chatted with some of them on the way, and they turned out to be pretty cool, still a bit goofy. The ravine is named—rather than the narrow, steep valley one might expect, it is instead a broad, bowl shaped feature called a cirque. These bowls were formed during the Ice Age as a glacier accumulated on a mountainside, and scooped out a round valley below it. Knife-edge ridges between adjacent cirques are known as arêtes, and if three of these ridges join up to form a pyramidal central peak, it is known as a cirque. This happens to be one of my favorite hikes in the Spring Mountains of Nevada, the Sedona area in Arizona, the Grand Canyon, Death Valley, the Mountains of Nevada, the Sedona area in Arizona, the Grand Canyon, Death Valley, and Blackwater. So what is your favorite? Think about it, and maybe suggest it as an outing. We’d all enjoy the memories, I’m sure.

See you outside!

View of MTR operation from Kayford Mountain. photo by Hannah Spencer

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Sierra Club Liability Policies For Chapter Outings

Sierra Club outings are open to everyone, members and non-members alike. Each outing is intended to be a wholesome, safe, and enjoyable experience in the outdoors. Participants must have suitable clothing, gear, and stamina, and are encouraged to select activities that match their individual abilities for outdoor adventures.

The Club offers a variety of outings from “easy” to “moderate” to “strenuous” that suit all activity levels. The difficulty of each outing is clearly designated in the announcement. Reservations are generally not required unless noted, but the outing leader may be contacted in advance for questions about the terrain, the difficulty and recommended gear.

Activities are normally held “rain or shine,” but may be postponed at the leader’s discretion for safety reasons in the event of inclement weather. Participants are reminded that all outdoor activities carry a degree of risk, and some take place in locations where professional emergency medical aid may be two or more hours away. People with health concerns should consult a physician to determine the advisability of participating in these or similar activities. The leader is responsible for the safety of all participants, and has the final authority to decide whether or not an individual may participate on a specific outing. Sierra Club safety policy requires that helicopters be on standby for out-of-hours trips, and a personal flotation device (PFD) be worn when using personal watercraft such as kayaks or canoes.

Unless noted in the announcement, Club outings are intended for adults. Children and dogs are not normally permitted, unless an outing is so designated. Minors (under 18 years of age) must be accompanied by a parent or a legal guardian, or they must have both 1) a signed permission slip, and 2) the leader’s prior consent to participate in the Club outing. Sierra Club outings officially begin and end at the trailhead.

The trail to the official starting point and back, even from an advertised meeting place, is the sole responsibility of each participant. While the Club encourages car-pooling, such arrangements are strictly between the riders and the drivers, and are not a part of the outing. Participants assume full responsibility and liabilty for all risks associated with such travel.

All participants on Sierra Club outings are required to sign a standard liability waiver, which can be viewed on the web at www.sierraclub.org/outings/chapter forms or by calling 415-977-5630.

The Sierra Club does not charge for chapter outings, although payment of park entrance fees, a share of campsite rental costs, permit fees, equipment rental charges, etc. may be required from the participants. The Sierra Club does not “leave-who-pay” trail techniques, including hiking and camping on durable surfaces, minimizing campfire impacts, packing out all trash, respecting wildlife, being considerate of other visitors, and leaving the environment as it was found.

The Sierra Club’s California Seller of Travel identification number is CST 208766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

Upcoming Outings — Winter / Spring

Sat, Nov 5 Greenbrier State Forest, Hart’s Run rated easy — Follow the Hart’s Run trail two miles, then continue on the forest service road through an area of big white pines and mixed deciduous forest. This area offers many possibilities for easy hikes. Meet at Picnic Shelter #1, Greenbrier State Forest at 10 AM. Exit I-64 East at White Sulphur Springs, turn right 3 miles. Contact leader to register. Leader: Frank Gifford, 304-653-4742, entoppwyged@gmail.com Nearest town: Lewisburg, WV Web info: www.greenbriestf.com Sat, Nov 12 Cooper’s Rock Autumn Adopt-a-Trail Service Outing rated easy to moderate — This will be our third 2011 trail maintenance on Sierra Club’s adopted Intermediate Cross Country Ski Trail at Cooper’s Rock State Forest. The fall clean-up emphasizes clearing the fallen leaves, drainage restoration and trail clearing. Trail length is 0.6 miles and total hiking length is a 1.25 mile loop. Volunteers should wear sturdy boots and carry work gloves, water, and snacks. Adults and adolescents are invited and those under 18 years of age must be accompanied by a parent or a legal guardian. Volunteers will be required to sign a statement to perform work at the trail at their own risk. Meet at 1:00 PM at the Food Lion in Smithsburg. MD Leader: Pam Peitz, 240-818-6554, pampeitz@comcast.net Nearest town: Morgantown, WV Web info: www.coopersrockstateforest.com Sat, Nov 12 South Boundary Trail of Big Draft Wilderness rated strenuous — 10 miles. Leader: Frank Gifford, 304-653-4742, entoppwyged@gmail.com Nearest town: White Sulphur Springs, WV Web info: www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stpedrbs0509646.pdf Sun, Nov 13 Valley Falls State Park rated moderate — Hike down to the waterfalls on the Tygart Valley River between Grafton and Fairmont. This little-known and somewhat tucked away state park has arguably one of the prettiest waterfalls in the state. We will meet at the picnic area, hike to the waterfalls and do several loop hikes through the park. Leader: Dan Soeder, 304-568-2164, Dan.Soeder@sierrclub.org Nearest town: Grafton, WV Web info: www.valleyfallsstatepark.com Sun, Nov 19 Black Rock and Annapolis Rock rated moderate — Start at the AT trailhead off White Oak Road in Smithsburg, hike up the Thurston Griggs trail to the Pogo Campground, go south on the AT to Black Rock and Annapolis Rock, which both have great views of the valley below. Total distance around 6 miles; some sections with rocky footing. Meet at 10 AM at the Food Lion in Smithsburg, MD. Leader: Pam Peitz, 240-818-6554, pampeitz@comcast.net Nearest town: Smithsburg, MD Web info: http://hiking.atth Поинтированных сетях оставлено 304-568-2164, Dan.Soeder@sierrclub.org Nearest town: Morgantown, WV Web info: www.montraills.org Sat, Nov 21 High Rock rated moderate — This is an out-and-back, approximately 5.5 miles roundtrip, fairly steep hike with easy footing on the AT. The hike starts on MD 491, and will last about 2.5 hours. Bring a snack or lunch for eating at the top on the rock outcropping, which has a great view. Meet at the Food Lion on Rt 64 in Smithsburg at 10AM. Contact leader for details. Leader: Pam Peitz, 240-818-6554, pampeitz@comcast.net Nearest town: Smithsburg, MD Web info: www.summitpost.org/south-mountain Sat, Dec 1 Deckers Creek and Caperton Trails rated moderate — Finish off 2011 with a brisk walk on the Morgantown waterfront trails. Meet at 10 AM in the parking area near downtown Morgantown and at noon for several out and back hikes totaling about six miles. Dress for the weather. Optional pub stop afterward for a hot toddy to warm up. Leader: Dan Soeder, 304-568-2164, Dan.Soeder@sierrclub.org Nearest town: Morgantown, WV Web info: www.montraills.org Sat, Jan 21 Capagon Resort State Park rated strenuous — Although this hike covers a distance of only about 7 miles, it will be strenuous with steep uphill and downhills. Hiking time is about three hours. Please contact trip leader for details if you are unsure of your stamina. Dress for the weather, and bring plenty of water, lunch and snacks. If there is snow or ice, hiking poles are a good idea. Meet in the lodge at Capagon Resort State Park at 10 AM (there is no admission charge to enter the park) Leader: Pam Peitz, 240-818-6554, pampeitz@comcast.net Nearest town: Berkeley Springs, WV Web info: www.capagonresort.com Sat, Feb 11 Laurel Fork Special Management Area rated easy to moderate — Six mile loop day hike on trails following old railroad grades along two mountain streams with mini waterfalls and cascades. Most of the trail is easy, with an elevation change of about 700 feet, a few small creek crossings, some rocky areas of the trail, and one short switchback elevation drop. This is a great hike for beginners, but there is a limit of 10 participants. The hike will start at 10 AM in the Local Springs Picnic Area off Rt 28 at the Potter stand on the Pemberton County lines. Contact leader for details. Leader: Brent Carminati , 304-567-2865, brentcar1@frontiernet.net Nearest town: Thornwood, WV Web info: www.pats.us/hiking/destinations/ va_laurf.html Sat, May 19 Spruce Knob/Seneca Creek Backcountry rated moderate — Enjoy a scenic 8-9 mile loop hike atop the tallest mountain in West Virginia. The hike will start at 10 AM on the Lumberjack Trail near the crest of Spruce Knob, then take the Huckabee Trail down to the Seneca Creek Trail and return. Lumberjack and Seneca Creek trails are fairly level and easy trails; the Huckleberry section has a moderately steep downhill grade with rocky areas. Hike is okay for beginners. Participants should bring rain gear, lunch and water, and wear sturdy footwear. Camping is available nearby at Spruce Knob Lake. Please pre-register with the leader. Leader: Brent Carminati , 304-567-2865, brentcar1@frontiernet.net Nearest town: Whitmer, WV Web info: Search Google for Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks to get Forest Service websites

Abbreviations Used

AMC Appalachian Mountain Club
AT Appalachian Trail
GWNF George Washington National Forest
JNF Jefferson National Forest
MG Monogahela Group
MNF Monongahela National Forest
NPS National Park Service
NRA National Recreation Area
NWR National Wildlife Refuge
PFD Personal Flotation Device (lifejacket)
SP State Forest
SP State Park
SNP Shenandoah National Park

Maryland Chapter Outings

Our neighboring chapter to the east has an active outings program, with many trips coming into West Virginia or western Maryland. These outings, by highly experienced leaders, range from easy to strenuous, and are open to everyone. Join an outing by checking out their calendar at maryland.sierraclub.org

Allegheny Group Outings
Sierra Club members in the Pittsburgh area belong to the Allegheny Group. They have a moderately active outings program as well as links to other local outdoor activities. Visit their website for an outings calendar and more details at alleghenysc.org

Potomac Region Outings (PRO)
This is an activity section of the Sierra Club Virginia Chapter, with an exciting outings program run by leaders who live in and around the Washington, D.C., area. A calendar of activities, information and updates can be found on their website at www.sierrapotomac.org

West Virginia Chapter Outings
For updated listings of outings sponsored by the West Virginia Chapter, check our Chapter website at west virginia.sierraclub.org

Valerie Wendt, President
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