

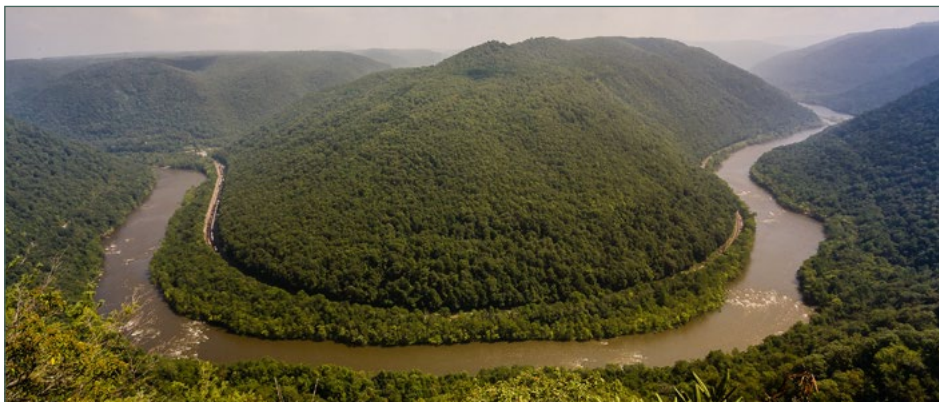
# M Mountain State Sierran

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 1

SPRING 2021

## New River Gorge's Leading Role in Public Lands and Climate Initiative

BY SARAH CROSS



*Horseshoe Bend from Grandview, New River Gorge. West Virginia's new national park and preserve preserves wilderness and stores climate-changing carbon. PHOTO BY KENT MASON.*

Even in the midst of a pandemic, public lands continue to bring people together. As citizens across the country attempt to manage the tremendous challenges of COVID-19, people have flocked to our public lands in record numbers. Support for federal and state public lands initiatives have also been supported widely among Republicans and Democrats. The Great American Outdoors Act had bipartisan support throughout the country and West Virginia. Then, WV Congressional

representatives came together to support our first national park. This support for public lands could not be more timely. As our country looks to pass national climate policy, the protection of public lands and waters will be vital in mitigating the effects of global warming.

### A New National Park and Preserve

Anyone following the news in West Virginia likely knows of our new national park and

preserve. On December 27 Congress passed the COVID-19 relief bill. Along with the extension of unemployment benefits and stimulus checks came something unexpected—the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

With bipartisan support, Congress redesignated the New River Gorge National River as New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, which encompasses over 72,000 acres. Different from a traditional National Park, approximately 90 percent of the acreage is designated as a national preserve, permitting hunting and fishing. The 7,021 acres of scenic riverfront have national park status, while the remaining 65,165 acres lie in the national preserve and allow hunting and fishing access.

This dual status makes New River Gorge unique in the continental U.S., with similar

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3](#)

### Inside this Issue

- |   |                               |    |                               |    |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| 2 | Chapter Directory             | 6  | Pipelines in the Court        | 11 | Industry's Challenges in WV   |
| 2 | From the Co-Chair             | 7  | Gas Storage in Ohio Valley    | 12 | WV Sierra Club Elections      |
| 3 | Brownfield Solar Installation | 8  | WV Legislative Outlook        | 13 | Outings Online                |
| 4 | Longview II                   | 9  | WV Water Standards            | 14 | C&O Canal Celebrates 50 Years |
| 5 | ACE Rule Overturned           | 10 | Pitching in and Mental Health |    |                               |

[SIERRACLUB.ORG/WEST-VIRGINIA](https://sierraclub.org/west-virginia)

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIR

## At Long Last, There is Hope!

BY ERIC ENGLE



Spring is a time of renewal and rebirth, and, though I write this while still in the grip of winter, I feel that deep sense of renewal, of hope, of regeneration. Why? Because the Biden administration is coming to the helm with a climate and environmental team, both domestically and internationally, that is truly inspiring; and majorities, albeit narrow majorities, of Democrats supportive of those causes are in control of Congress.

President Biden, in his first days in office, has rejoined the Paris Agreement on climate change, ditched the permit for the Keystone XL Pipeline, and reinstated regulations of methane emissions from oil and gas operations, just to name a few of his initiatives. Former Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM), Indigenous person and attendee of the 2016 Dakota Access pipeline protests in North Dakota, is now set to be—we hope by the time you read this—Secretary of the Department of the Interior, a position charged with overseeing federal lands. This makes me hopeful about what kind of Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) we can expect during the Biden administration.

These changes also come with a lot of responsibility (read: opportunity) for West Virginians. Our own Senator Manchin is now Chairman of the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee and the most conservative Democrat in a 50-50 split chamber. This means we must keep lines of communication open with Sen. Manchin, persuading him to vote in favor of climate, environmental, and energy policy working its way through his committee to have any chance of passage by the full Senate.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

| <b>West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Directory</b>   |   | <i>Term ends at first meeting of indicated year</i>                                |
|--|---|--|
| <b>CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</b>   |   |  |
| <b>Eric Engle, Co-Chair ('22)</b><br>304-488-4384 • ericengle85@yahoo.com                  | <b>Jonah Kone ('22)</b><br>jonahkone@gmail.com  | <b>Dan Taylor ('21)</b><br>304-521-9865 • danotbob@gmail.com                       |
| <b>Aileen Curfman, Co-Chair ('21)</b><br>304-433-5321 • acurfman@gmail.com                 | <b>Ciera Pennington ('21)</b><br>304-807-0713 • ciera@kaleidoscopewv.com                            |  |
| <b>Kevin Campbell, CCL Delegate, ('21)</b><br>304-613-4099 • kevincampbell0@gmail.com      | <b>Maura Ross ('22)</b><br>maura.ross27@gmail.com   |  |
| <b>MONONGAHELA GROUP EXCOMM</b>  |   |  |
| <b>Adrienne Epley Brown, Chair &amp; Outings ('23)</b><br>adrienne_epley@yahoo.com         | <b>Jim Kotcon, Chapter Delegate ('22)</b><br>304-594-3322 • jkotcon@gmail.com                       | <b>Sally Wilts, Treasurer</b><br>304-379-7567 • sallywilts@yahoo.com               |
| <b>Michael Attfield, Vice Chair ('22)</b><br>attfield@comcast.net                          | <b>Betsy Lawson, Secretary ('22)</b><br>bjaegerart@gmail.com  | <b>Beth Rota, Conservation ('23)</b><br>573-999-5926 • beth.rota@gmail.com         |
| <b>EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM</b>  |   |  |
| <b>Gail Kohlhorst, Chair ('23)</b><br>304-283-7222 • kohlhorst@comcast.net                 | <b>Aileen Curfman, Treasurer ('22)</b><br>304-433-5321 • acurfman@gmail.com                         | <b>Roz Eiler, Webmaster ('21)</b><br>540-931-5906 • rozeiler@gmail.com             |
| <b>Regina Hendrix, Conservation ('23)</b><br>304-725-0223 • regina.hendrix@comcast.net     | <b>Gerald Hatcher, Political ('22)</b><br>304-240-8614, dgeraldh@frontiernet.net                    |  |
| <b>Maggie Loudon, Secretary ('23)</b><br>maglouden@gmail.com                               | <b>Chris Craig, Outings ('22)</b><br>304-433-1260 • ccraig@laurellodge.com                          |  |
| <b>OTHER CHAPTER LEADERS</b>   |   |  |
| <b>Kathy Gregg, Archives/Chapter History</b><br>304-472-4055 • gregg@wwwc.edu              | <b>Mel Waggy, Secretary &amp; Public Lands</b><br>melwaggy@gmail.com                                | <b>Karen Yarnell, Wilderness Coalition</b><br>304-657-0812 • bioverdant@icloud.com |
| <b>Jim Kotcon, Political &amp; Conservation</b><br>304-594-3322 • jkotcon@gmail.com        | <b>Ethan Cade, SCC, WVU</b><br>304-638-0484 • erc0025@mix.ecu.edu                                   | <b>OPEN, Gas Committee</b>   |
| <b>OPEN, Membership Engagement</b>   | <b>Sally Wilts, Treasurer</b><br>304-379-7567 • sallywilts@yahoo.com                                |  |
| <b>Chris Craig, Newsletter &amp; Outings</b><br>304-433-1260 • ccraig@laurellodge.com      | <b>Maura Ross, Webmaster</b><br>304-724-7612 • maura.ross27@gmail.com                               |  |
| <b>REGIONAL SIERRA CLUB ORGANIZING STAFF</b>   |   |  |
| <b>Bill Price, East Reg Snr Organizing Mgr</b><br>304-389-8822 • bill.price@sierraclub.org | <b>Karan Ireland, Senior Campaign Representative</b><br>304-356-8774 • karan.ireland@sierraclub.org |  |

# Berkeley County Brownfield Goes Green

BY AILEEN CURFMAN

On January 7, the Berkeley County Council announced plans to build a solar production facility on a 700-acre brownfield in north Berkeley County. The site is part of a 1,242-acre tract where Dupont River Works manufactured explosives from 1953 to 1994. The Dupont site is not considered appropriate for most commercial or industrial development. Currently, the property is home to several small businesses, a church, and a soccer complex. The solar facility will be built by Torch Clean Energy, a Colorado-based company, and will be capable of producing 100 megawatts of power. Construction will create about 200 jobs.

A representative of the company says that the project is “still in the planning/engineering phase, so we don’t have any final drawings to show at this point. We are just beginning the Sketch Plan/Site Plan process with the County.” Distribution lines to the Bedington substation will probably be underground. A small substation will connect the generated power with the Bedington substation. After construction, he predicts that road traffic will not increase much, noting that “when the project is operating, there would only be a few trips per month for project maintenance”.

A proposed Payment-In-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) agreement requires the company to pay real estate taxes, but the company would be exempt from paying personal property taxes for 15 years. Instead, Berkeley County would be paid \$1850 per megawatt of production capacity. The company has also agreed to install a solar array at a nearby school, resulting in at least \$15,000 savings to the school’s energy costs. Additionally, the company has made a \$75,000 contribution to Berkeley County to improve quality of life through better parks and recreation, cultural and historical assets, and public safety initiatives. It has promised an additional \$450,000 contribution for these purposes. The PILOT was approved at the Council’s Jan. 7 meeting.



*This former Dupont industrial site in Berkeley County may soon be home to a large solar installation that will produce 100 megawatts of power. PHOTO BY AILEEN CURFMAN.*

The WV Chapter of Sierra Club welcomes the addition of large, utility-scale solar production as a viable alternative to the destructive extraction of coal, oil, and gas. We advocate for training opportunities so that more West Virginians will enter this expanding field of employment. We also push for legislation that would help homeowners who install solar panels on their property. These smaller arrays are typically installed by local businesses, providing local economies with another needed shot in the arm. For a fully developed solar energy grid, we hope to see solar panels sprouting on rooftops and brownfields throughout the Mountain State. 🍃

*More information about the project and the site can be found at:*

- [www.developmentauthority.com](http://www.developmentauthority.com)  
(search Torch Energy)
- [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)  
(search Falling Waters, WV)

New River | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

arrangements only in Alaska. While hunting has been an important use of the land for many locals, the legislation extended hunting access to an additional 368 acres in the formerly restricted Grandview area.

Passage of this legislation was a proud moment for WV Senators Capito and Manchin, along with Representative Carol Miller (R-US 3). In a time when bipartisan support is all the buzz, this one fits the bill. While West Virginia has a struggling economy and an extensive history of natural resource extraction, legislators are hoping to hone in on the economic benefits of outdoor tourism.

## **Executive Order to protect 30% of US lands and waters by 2030**

Climate was a major topic in the recent presidential election. A new executive order signed by President Biden included goals for protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030. These efforts will be vital in slowing the effects of climate change and protecting public lands.

Ultimately, reducing our dependency on fossil fuels is not enough to slow the negative effects of climate change, such as severe storms, flooding, dangerous temperature fluctuations, air pollution, and more. Protecting lands and waters helps to mitigate climate change by storing and removing carbon through a process known as “carbon sequestration.” The more carbon that is stored and removed through natural processes, the less carbon dioxide will reach the atmosphere. This is considered a natural solution to climate change, and it also helps slow down the depletion of the ozone layer. By protecting natural outdoor spaces and resources, we are combating climate change. Academic literature suggests natural solutions can provide over a third of cost-effective climate change mitigation needed by 2030.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



# Longview II: Clean New Name But Same Old Dirty Emissions

BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON



Longview II would find its home in the Mon Valley alongside other power plants, adding to the fossil fuel emissions in the region. PHOTO BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON.

The Mon Group continues its work to stop construction of a new gas-fired power plant, Longview II, just upstream from Morgantown. The plant was proposed two years ago, and its investors requested a Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) agreement from the Monongalia County Commission (MCC) as a condition for building it. Unfortunately, the MCC approved the PILOT on December 16.

**Story of the PILOT:** As of mid-December, the PILOT agreement still had not been subject to a public hearing. Duane Nichols, of the Mon Valley Clean Air Coalition, noted that, with no public announcement, the name *Longview* had been changed to *Mountain State Clean Energy* (gas facility) and *Mountain State Renewable* (nearby proposed solar facility). Further, only by checking the MCC agenda on the Commission website did Mon Group Conservation Chair Jim Kotcon find that the Longview PILOT agreement was to be announced at a December 9 meeting. There was no announcement of the decision in the local newspaper. Why was the MCC being so secretive?

On December 16, in a packed meeting to vote on the PILOT, Jim and Duane were given only three minutes each to speak against it, while Longview's representatives were given five minutes each to praise the PILOT agreement. The vote was held and passed the agreement 3-0. A public hearing was again

requested, but Commissioner Tom Bloom said the issue had been dealt with at the state level several months ago. That is, there would be no public hearing. Jim submitted a four-page response attacking the PILOT at all levels. But it was clear the PILOT had been decided long ago. (Fortunately, the county issued separate PILOT agreements for the gas facility and the solar facility, so if the gas facility fails to attract investors, the solar plant could still be realized.)

Unlike the older PILOT agreement for Longview I, Longview II's (i.e., Mountain State Clean Energy) will pay more to rent the land from the county—money which will stay in the county, and less for the PILOT, which is dispersed throughout the state. But the agreements say nothing about greenhouse gases, nothing to assure continued employment or *Just Transition* for workers at the older Longview I or Fort Martin plants, and certainly nothing that prorates the PILOT to the actual cost of construction. While county commissioners seemed proud of their agreement, there is little in it to protect the county.

**Story of a Permit:** On October 27 the WV Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) held a virtual public hearing on Longview's application for an air permit for Longview I's coal-burning plant under the new ACE (Affordable Clean Energy) Rule,

President Trump's undoing of the Obama-era Clean Power Plan. However, the ACE Rule had not yet been finalized, and the permit was not required. It would seem Longview I was hoping to be the first fossil fuel plant to get a permit that would allow it to emit more greenhouse gases.

Ultimately, this early application may have been for naught, because the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia struck down the ACE rule, saying Trump's EPA fundamentally misconceived the Clean Air Act. (See ACE Rule, p. 5.) This was announced on Inauguration Day, a great gift to the Biden environmental team and the country.

Further, as reported on *Yahoo! Finance* (1-22-21), the Biden administration is bringing back the social cost of carbon, methane, and nitrous oxide, "attempting to provide a financial figure for the damages wrought by greenhouse gas emissions in terms of rising interest rates, and the destroyed farmland and infrastructure caused by natural disasters linked to global climate change." This should give investors in fossil fuel plants something to think about.

**Sierra Club's (and Your!) Response:** The Sierra Club, through its Beyond Dirty Fuel Campaign, encourages divestment from fossil fuel infrastructure. The WV Chapter is investigating this as an approach to fight the Mountain State Clean Energy (Longview II) project. This facility will generate millions of tons of greenhouse gases, and such investments have a dim future.

In the meantime, interested members, especially those in Monongalia County, should be on the lookout for a Club email soliciting comments to WVDEP on a permit for the gas-powered plant, once the comment period is open. Raising your voice against more polluting emissions in West Virginia may be one of the last remaining actions you can take against yet another fossil fuel-burning plant in the Mountain State. 🍃

# ACE Rule Overturned and How It Played Out in West Virginia

BY JIM KOTCON



One of the major climate-related legacies of the Obama Administration was the Clean Power Plan (CPP). Adopted in 2017, the rule required an average of 30% reductions in power plant emissions of greenhouse gases.

The US Supreme Court suspended the CPP rule in 2016, and President Trump replaced it in 2019 with what he called the “American Clean Energy” rule (ACE). The ACE rule did not require any emissions reductions, only that power plants assess whether energy efficiency improvements at their plants were cost-effective. In some cases this would allow plants to actually increase their emissions, as long as the “heat rate” (amount of coal burned per unit of electricity) was lowered. The rule name “Clean Energy” was really quite deceptive, because even the EPA admitted that the number of Americans dying from power plant air pollution would increase under the rule.

## ACE in West Virginia

The WV Legislature in 2015 had placed a number of restrictions on the WV Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) and its ability to implement the CPP. WVDEP was required to consider a number of factors, including the economic impact of closing power plants as well as the impact on coal mining, and was prohibited from submitting a CPP rule to EPA unless the Legislature approved it.

Most of those restrictions were removed by the Legislature after the adoption of the ACE rule, but a last-minute amendment was added in committee. It authorized WVDEP to “submit a complete or partial state compliance plan to the federal Environmental Protection Agency no later than September 1, 2020, which may be comprised of one or more ... facilities that are voluntarily prepared to move forward with a compliance plan...” No one really knew what this meant, but it became clearer when, in June 2020, the Longview power plant in Monongalia County submitted an application for a “voluntary” permit. WVDEP has developed a proposed rule to implement ACE, but it has not yet been approved by the WV Legislature, so this voluntary permit was

proposed under a different rule governing construction permits (even though no construction was proposed).

In a rush to give Longview its ACE permit, WVDEP held hearings on its proposed rule and submitted the draft to the Legislature, then held more hearings on Longview’s permit application and on a proposed “partial state implementation plan.” The WV Chapter of Sierra Club filed extensive comments on each of these, pointing out numerous flaws in the proposed permits, as well as the rushed process of attempting to issue a permit before the rule authorizing it was approved. Of greatest concern, the proposed Longview permit authorized even greater emission levels than Longview currently emits, and proposed to allow ever-increasing emissions in future years. (Interestingly, even the WV Coal Association went on record at these hearings supporting regulations to limit greenhouse gas emissions, although the limits they supported allowed those ever-increasing emissions.) Longview’s proposed permit would extend for the life of the plant, and by last December, the permit was approved by WVDEP.

## ACE Appeals Court Ruling

Meanwhile, a number of states and organizations had filed appeals challenging the ACE rule in court. On January 19 the US Court of Appeals ruled that EPA had relied on a “[fundamental] misconception” of the Clean Air Act to limit the ACE rule to heat-rate improvements. The Court ordered EPA to reconsider the rule. Given that the ruling happened one day before President Biden took office, it is widely believed that this ruling gives the Biden Administration a free hand in re-writing the rule.

President Biden has called for bringing power plant emissions of greenhouse gases to zero by 2035. This goal is technically feasible, and is considered essential to avoid catastrophic global warming. In his first full day in office, he issued Executive Orders to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, to have all federal agencies review their climate rules, to

consider the social cost of carbon as well as methane and nitrous oxides, and to upgrade federal energy efficiency plans. He also ordered plans to preserve wildlands. This is the most comprehensive climate plan ever created in the U.S., and it could create thousands of American jobs.

But what does it all mean for Longview’s permit and the WVDEP ACE rule? That is still unclear, but there does not seem to be a need for the WV Legislature to adopt a rule, and the permit for Longview appears to be null and void.

## One Last Question

Although it has been asked repeatedly, it is not clear why Longview was in such a rush to get a permit under the ACE rule. There does not seem to be a good reason for requesting a permit before the rule authorizing it is finalized. One expert has speculated that Longview sought the permit to provide assurance to investors as the plant resolved its 2020 bankruptcy. And it does appear that the legislative change authorizing a voluntary permit occurred shortly after Longview began bankruptcy negotiations with investors in January 2020. Or perhaps they merely wanted to get it approved before President Trump left office.

Longview has never publicly explained their reasons for seeking the ACE permit, and it now appears to have been a wasted effort on their part.

## Lessons Learned?

The saga is interesting because it illustrates the level of denial of the impacts of climate change in the Trump EPA and the WV Legislature. This is not merely a discretionary policy choice. Climate change is real, and the need to reduce emissions is real. Attempting to deny that scientific reality was a key factor in the Court decision vacating the ACE rule.

The other lesson is that citizen involvement can make a difference, even with the most anti-environmental entities. Endless pressure, endlessly applied! 🍀



# PennEast Pipeline Court Case Could Have Big Impact on West Virginia

BY TRACY CANNON



On February 3 the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision to hear the case PennEast Pipeline v. New Jersey. This indicates the Justices are not content with the case's 2019 3rd Circuit Court decision, in which New Jersey won. The appeal is expected to be heard in April and the ruling to come out in June.

In many progressive states over the past few years, governors have been able to block pipelines from going through their states. In 2019 the 3rd Circuit ruled that the PennEast pipeline company could not take land in which the state of New Jersey has an interest. (The court cited "sovereign immunity," a legal doctrine whereby a state cannot commit a legal wrong and is immune from civil suit or criminal prosecution.) If the Supreme Court overturns the decision this year, it will allow private parties to take state land through eminent domain for projects such as gas pipelines.

The PennEast appeal has big implications for West Virginia because of its similarity to the Potomac Pipeline, presently blocked by the state of Maryland and stalled in the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals as it waits for the June SCOTUS decision. The proposed Potomac Pipeline would go from Pennsylvania, through

Maryland, under the Potomac River and into the Eastern Panhandle. It would provide Rockwool and other heavy industry in the Panhandle with almost unlimited fracked gas.

The gas industry and industrial developers in the Eastern Panhandle have been lobbying for years to bring such a pipeline into the area, to support the development of heavy industry. A West Virginia law (SB390) passed in 2015 states that the Public Service Commission should support the building of pipelines in "underserved areas," such as the Eastern Panhandle, by allowing Mountaineer Gas to raise its rates in advance to cover this expansion.

The proposed PennEast pipeline would be three feet in diameter, carrying a billion cubic feet of fracked gas each day along its 116-mile path from Luzerne County, Pennsylvania to Mercer County, New Jersey. The Potomac Pipeline, in contrast, would be only eight inches in diameter and 3.5 miles long. It would carry 47.5 million cubic feet of gas per day from Fulton County, Pennsylvania to Berkeley Springs, WV, where it would connect with previously laid pipelines through Martinsburg and to the Rockwool Facility in Jefferson County.

Presently, the Potomac Pipeline is in legal limbo, and construction has not begun. A 6-inch line, built around 1960, brings gas to Martinsburg from Winchester, Virginia; however, this supply is inadequate to serve Rockwool and other recently built industrial facilities. Instead, Mountaineer brings gas in by truck, a method that the company considers too expensive and unreliable.

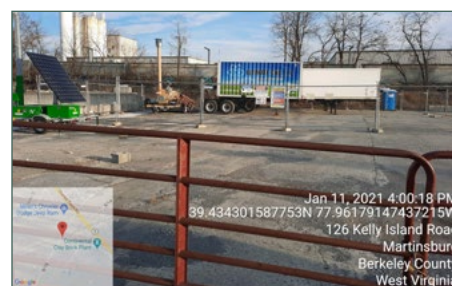
The lack of an abundant fracked gas supply is one of the main things holding Berkeley and Jefferson Counties back from even more industrial development. Sandy Hamilton, executive director of the Berkeley County Development Authority said at the group's meeting in June that inadequate "natural gas availability and broadband access continue to be the greatest challenges to the area." (She has a sympathetic audience in the Berkeley County Council, where four of the five members are developers.)

One company—UGI Energy Services—stands to gain tremendously from a PennEast court win in June. UGI is part of the PennEast Consortium and has plans to buy Mountaineer Gas. UGI is also a supplier of Mountaineer's liquefied natural gas now being trucked to injection sites along Mountaineer's pipeline.

A court decision in favor of PennEast would likely also overrule Maryland and result in the construction of the Potomac Pipeline. Construction of the Potomac Pipeline could harm the environment and human health, as well as the tourist economy so important to the Eastern Panhandle.

At this late hour, when the nation is finally starting to address climate change by stopping enormous pipeline projects like the Keystone XL and Atlantic Coast Pipelines, why must a beautiful place like the Eastern Panhandle be the last sacrifice zone for a fracking industry trying to save itself by expanding into new market areas?

*The proposed Potomac Pipeline would bring fracked gas to injection sites and pipelines in West Virginia. Mountaineer Gas Liquefied Natural Gas injection site near Berkeley Springs, WV (above). Mountaineer Gas Compressed Natural Gas injection site on Kelly Island Road in Martinsburg (right).* PHOTOS BY TRACY CANNON.



# Dangerous Petro & Plastics Project Seeks Permits in Ohio River Valley

## Sierra Club Speaks Out Against Irresponsible Powhatan Salt Company LLC & Mountaineer NGL Storage LLC Effort

**BY ERIC ENGLE**

Several West Virginia Sierra Club members attended a recent virtual presentation hosted by the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), Concerned Ohio River Residents (CORR), and others regarding a dangerous initiative in the Ohio River Valley.

A fact sheet provided by CORR sums up the proposal:

*“Powhatan Salt Company LLC has applied through the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) for three solution mining well permits to begin creating storage caverns in the Salina salt formation, just 2.5 miles north of Clarington, OH along the Ohio River in Monroe County, OH, so that its sister company, Mountaineer NGL Storage LLC, can store natural gas liquids (NGL) next to and potentially beneath the Ohio River.”*

These salt caverns would be used to store liquid ethane, butane, propane, and other products derived from natural gas recovery, extracted by hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Ethane is a key resource used in plastics production (i.e., polyethylene), so it is crucial for the many plastics production plants proposed throughout the region.

To create the storage caverns, CORR states that Powhatan Salt Company “*would inject millions of gallons of fresh water underground at high pressures to carve out salt cavities. Powhatan would withdraw approximately 1,928,000 gallons of fresh water each day from the Ohio River to carve out the first storage cavern. More caverns could be constructed to increase storage capacity, each of which would require approximately 380,200,000 [total] gallons of freshwater.*”

This water from the Ohio River, a drinking water source for 5 million people, would not remain usable for drinking or washing water, agriculture, or recreation. It would become a salty brine and would be transported to a Westlake Chemical facility for processing, which only “recycles” the water for additional industrial use and does not make it safe and potable again.

There are so many risks here that it's hard to know where to begin. Contamination of

underground aquifers as well as surface water sources is a threat. Stored gases will potentially leak to other area wells and fracking sites. A sinkhole could be formed similar to the one that formed in Bayou Corne, Louisiana after Texas Brine Company's underground salt dome collapsed. (It has grown in size to 34 acres and led to the long-term evacuation of hundreds of area residents.) The gas storage could result in an explosion like the one outside Hutchinson, Kansas where natural gas escaped from a failed wellbore and exploded through an abandoned well 9 miles away. Area residents could be threatened by a methane leak like the one near Aliso Canyon, California that displaced 5,000 households for four months, the largest leak from an underground storage facility in US history.

Prior to a Feb. 6 deadline, the WV Chapter of Sierra Club submitted comments to ODNR requesting a 60-day public comment extension, a public hearing, and that a fact sheet be prepared by ODNR for better public understanding. The people of Appalachia cannot keep being sacrificed to dying extraction industries wanting to revive themselves with plastics and petrochemicals. Enough is enough! 🍀

New River | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

The goal of protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030 is not a new concept. Known as the “30x30 Campaign,” it was championed by former U.S. Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico. Last year, he introduced a 30x30 resolution. Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM) followed suit and introduced the “Thirty by Thirty Resolution to Save Nature,” which was the House companion resolution.

More recently, Rep. Haaland has been nominated by the Biden administration to serve as Secretary of the Interior. If confirmed, she will be the first Native American to serve in that capacity. The Department of the Interior oversees the majority of our country's public lands, including the National Wildlife Refuges and National Park Service lands in West Virginia, including the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. Interestingly, the hearing to consider Congresswoman Haaland's appointment will be held by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, chaired by WV's Senator Joe Manchin.

In fact, both of the Mountain State's U.S. Senators currently hold great political power on environmental decision making, with Senator Capito as the new Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. Let us congratulate our political leaders and hold them accountable on environmental and energy policymaking. Send them a quick message through WV River's action link—[tinyurl.com/ActForWVWater](https://tinyurl.com/ActForWVWater).

*Dr. Sarah Cross is the Campaigns Coordinator for the WV Rivers Coalition. She works on climate initiatives and organizes West Virginians for Public Lands, an alliance of individuals, businesses and organizations working to enhance and protect our public lands and waters. Sign up to receive news and alerts on these issues at [wvivers.org/our-programs/public-lands/](https://wvivers.org/our-programs/public-lands/).*

The WV Legislature's 2021 session gets underway on February 10 with a "super-majority" of Republicans in both the State Senate and the House of Delegates. A lot of discussion has occurred about addressing COVID-19, income tax cuts, and education changes. Although few details are available, regulatory rollbacks are also high priorities for legislative leaders. We will need to keep careful tabs on these efforts.

The WV Chapter of Sierra Club will again be working with the WV Environmental Council to seek environmental improvements and prevent weakening of state laws. Specifically, we will focus on the following priorities with our legislative allies:

- Water quality standards rule and the Safe Drinking Water Bill. ([See related story, p. 9](#)) The Safe Drinking Water Bill is an effort to regulate C-8 and related compounds (PFOAs) associated with certain chemical manufacturing.
- Power Purchase Agreements legislation. This bill would make it easier for non-profit groups and government organizations to install solar power facilities.
- Expansion of recycling, including Styrofoam. (No explanation needed!)
- Protection of funding for WV Department of Environmental Protection inspectors

in the state budget. The WVDEP is greatly reducing the number of inspectors for oil and gas wells, with each inspector now responsible for literally thousands of gas wells. Unless more funding is provided, many wells will never get inspected.

- Resolution to study energy use in state buildings. Energy efficiency is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to create jobs, save taxpayers money, and help the environment. A triple win!
- Just Transition bill. This bill would assist fossil-fuel-dependent workers and communities in transitioning to a clean energy economy. While President Biden has made that a priority, we need state-level implementation.
- Disclosure of dark money political expenditures. Secret campaign contributions pollute our democracy, and closing loopholes is essential.

We also expect to use a good deal of our resources to educate the large number of newly elected legislators, especially in the House of Delegates, and to provide fact sheets and grassroots outreach on any potentially harmful legislation as well as proactive bills.

A key concern will be new rules to restrict public access and limit public hearings

regarding legislation. Under long-standing rules, anyone could request a public hearing on a bill before it was considered by a committee. But the change makes that entirely discretionary, and many believe the goal is to limit opposition to leadership bills. While it makes sense to limit potential for spread of COVID-19, many non-profit groups are concerned that the new rules are overly restrictive and are merely a cover for back-room legislative shenanigans. (That couldn't happen in West Virginia, could it? Duh!).

Finally, the past year has seen a number of coal companies declare bankruptcy and seek to duck out of their reclamation responsibilities. Bankruptcy laws generally ignore these environmental requirements. West Virginia's Special Reclamation Fund is supposed to clean up abandoned mines, but it is effectively bankrupt. The gas industry bonding is potentially in even worse shape. We can expect unplugged wells to remain a threat unless serious reforms are implemented to require the companies that profit from extracting our resources to be responsible for cleaning up their messes. Look for legislation to address this problem.

For more information or to get involved, contact Conservation Chair Jim Kotcon at [jkotcon@gmail.com](mailto:jkotcon@gmail.com). 🍀

---

## From the Co-Chair | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The Sierra Club of West Virginia is devoted to working with Sen. Manchin and the Biden administration, as well as the rest of Congress, to bring about the federal public policy we desperately need to address anthropogenic global climate crisis and to engage in intersectional environmentalism—addressing the systemic and institutionalized racism and classism inherent in environmental degradation.

The elections in West Virginia didn't really come out in favor of environmental policy progress. Republicans running against regulation gained supermajorities in the House of Delegates and State Senate, and Republican coal baron Jim Justice remains Governor; but we will not be deterred. We can still work on federal and state policy to cap abandoned oil and gas wells and make industry pay to do the work. We can advocate to legalize power-purchasing agreements (PPAs) in our state to help expand residential and commercial solar and other small-scale renewable energy projects. And we can lobby to pass the Modern Jobs (MOJO) Act, reintroduced by Del. Evan Hansen (D-51), to build solar projects on abandoned mine land and reclamation sites, which will attract corporations and industries with green energy and sustainability commitments.

So much is possible in 2021, but we'll need your help. Won't you consider donating, becoming a member, renewing your membership, and joining us in our activism this year? Together, we can make a world of difference . . . literally. 🍀



# Respect My Water, Respect My Health: No More Toxins in WV's Water

BY AUTUMN CROWE



How much toxic pollution is allowed in our rivers and streams before the water becomes harmful to public health? This legislative session, lawmakers are tasked with making that important decision as the state updates the human health criteria included in our water quality standards. The human health criteria establish a safe level for pollutants, where the concentrations of chemicals in our water will not harm the public's health. These criteria regulate some of the most toxic chemicals known, including DDT, chloroform, and cyanide.

In 2015 the EPA updated its values of human health criteria for 94 pollutants, based on the amount of water we drink, number of fish we eat, and Americans' average weight. They also relied on other factors, such as cancer risk. Their recalculation used the best available science at the time and resulted in some of the values for pollutants decreasing and others increasing.

In preparation for the 2019 state legislative session, the WV Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) proposed updates to 56 of the 94 pollutants, using a state fish consumption rate that was half the national average. Since the state decided we ate less fish, we could be exposed to higher levels of chemicals. During that legislative session, there was heated debate on the criteria updates.

Ultimately, the lawmakers decided to kick the can down the road for further study. That road has now led us to the 2021 legislative session.

Over the past two years, the WV Rivers Coalition has studied this issue in depth. In the fall of 2019, WVDEP invited proposals on how the state should proceed. WV Rivers submitted a proposal that made three recommendations: 1) don't weaken any existing standards, 2) use a fish consumption rate that is consistent with neighboring states, and 3) adopt all the criteria that would strengthen our standards, including pollutants that are not currently regulated.

Last summer, WVDEP submitted changes to the water quality standards that the 2021 Legislature is now considering. WVDEP took one step in the right direction, but the majority of their proposed changes don't go far enough to protect public health. Fortunately, WVDEP is now using the national average fish consumption rate, which is more protective of public health and in line with our neighboring states.

However, of the 94 chemicals EPA has recommended, WVDEP has selected only

24 to update. And unfortunately, not all of the standards would be stronger; 13 of the 24 would be weakened. Some would be weakened quite drastically, allowing more toxins in our water.

Public health experts agree that any additional exposure to these toxic chemicals would be harmful to public health. In a state with the third-highest cancer death rate in the nation, do we really want to take that risk? We need your help in protecting our water from toxic pollutants. Contact your legislators and tell them to make public health their No. 1 priority and reject any change that would weaken our water quality standards.

Find contact information for your State Senators and Delegate in the Public Officials box, p. 16. Sign up for WV Rivers alerts at [www.wvrivers.org](http://www.wvrivers.org).

*Autumn Crowe is the Staff Scientist for WV Rivers. A native West Virginian and WVU alum, she was employed in the environmental programs of native tribes in Alaska and Nevada prior to her work protecting rivers and streams in the Mountain State.*

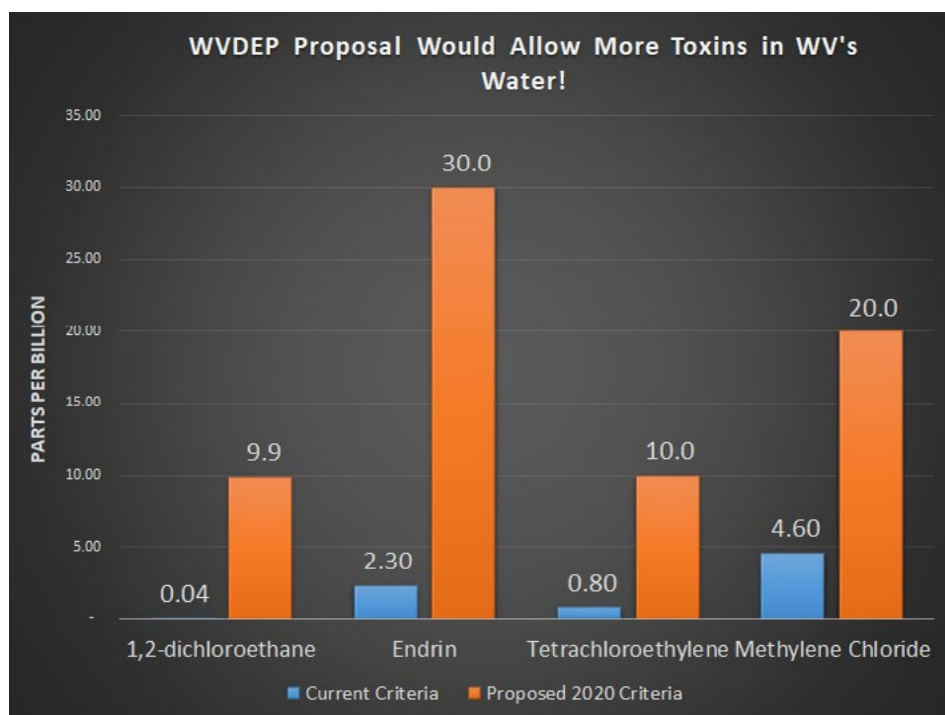


PHOTO BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN

# What Can One Person Do: Pitch In!

BY AILEEN CURFMAN

*In the following addition to Aileen Curfman's series on personal environmentalism, fictional Bretta discovers a healthy, productive way to deal with the stress of everyday life—even in the age of COVID.*

**Bretta's head was throbbing.** Every heartbeat sounded like a pair of bass drums mounted in her inner ears. Every drumbeat pushed a curtain of crimson into the edges of her field of view. Her computer screen seemed to be swimming. What to do first? Pay the bills? Complain about the shoddy car repair that had left her helpless on the side of the road? Reply politely to her mother's "helpful" advice? Write to her Senator telling him why he ought to support the bill that he had announced he would oppose? And what about the resume she never had time to work on?

Without even closing her laptop, Bretta got up from her desk. She made for the sofa and collapsed. That's where Ted found her when he came up from the basement, humming the tune he'd been hearing. "Brighten the corner where you are..." Bretta pulled the sofa throw over her face and turned away.

A little later, Ted returned with two cups of tea. Stirring in some sugar, he smiled. "They were adorable. Best Zoom meeting ever. The other kids sang from their living rooms while Mason sat in the corner of the basement and gradually turned up our camping lantern. Not a bad role for a kid who can't carry a tune in a bucket. I sent the recording to all the parents."

"I should have gone down there with you," Bretta admitted. "I accomplished nothing except for giving myself a major headache."

"A few of the families are meeting at 4:00. Someone dumped some old lumber in front of that hardware store that shut down. We're going to pick it up. We'll all be masked, and each family group will work together, distanced from the other families. Why don't you join us?"

Bretta thought it over. "I might as well. Today is totally shot anyway."

A few hours later, she was pitching the last broken two-by-four into the back of Lonnie McPherson's pickup. Her headache was

forgotten. Her arms and back had gotten the workout she'd skipped that morning. She was smelling the pizzas that Anita Towson had just brought. The parking lot looked great! Someone had even straightened the forlorn "For Sale" sign. The setting sun was shining through the trees, casting a golden glow. And her son, Mason, was singing tunelessly at top volume,

"Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do,

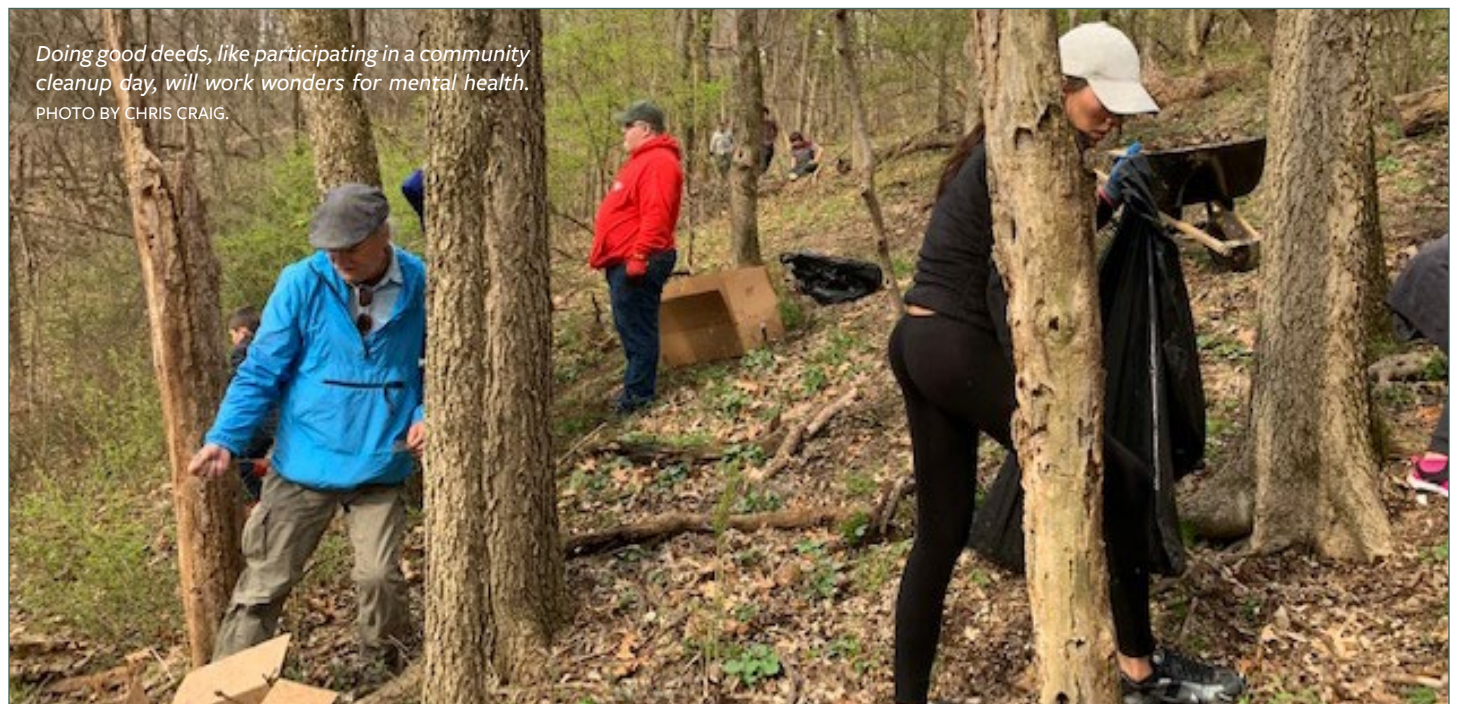
Do not wait to shed your light afar,

To the many neighbors ever near you now be true,

Brighten the corner where you are."

Bretta grabbed Ted's hand and gave it a big squeeze. "Thank you," she whispered.

You can't save the world. But you can make a piece of it better. Not a big piece, but that little piece is better because of what you did. Knowing you've done that can give you the strength to go on. 🍃



*Doing good deeds, like participating in a community cleanup day, will work wonders for mental health.*  
PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



# Opinion: A State Stacked Against Human Health and Opportunity?

BY REGINA HENDRICKS



Isn't it time to turn the page on the longstanding environmental and economic policies that have kept so many West Virginians in poverty and sickness?

When I left the state in the mid-1950s the Kanawha "Chemical Valley" was a financially prosperous area because of the chemical and extractive industries. There was not much job diversity though. Many young people were forced to leave in search of employment. The local employment office fueled this exodus by offering information on out-of-state job opportunities.

After a long absence I retired and returned to the Kanawha Valley in 1998, where I found a greatly reduced population and a sicker and poorer area than I remembered. Job opportunities were still very limited. The air was still polluted, the river still laced with chemicals. How did our state miss out on American prosperity and growth?

After another 11 years, the 2008 Bayer CropScience explosion in Institute prompted me to move to West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle where the air and water was much

healthier. The state's recent assault on the Jefferson County environment says a lot about how the WV Development Office and the WV Economic Development Authority harm local economies statewide. No wonder poverty and sickness prevail in West Virginia.

The area around my new home has many economic opportunities because of its location, where proximity to the Eastern Seaboard makes marketing and shipment of products accessible. It was pleasing to look at what was planned for us in the Jefferson County 2035 Comprehensive Plan: a train/bus station, mixed-use housing, recreation and shopping, and light industry.

During the summer of 2018 I was shocked to learn that zoning had been quickly and illegally changed to allow Rockwool, a highly polluting Danish corporation, to occupy the land that is in our once-attractive comprehensive plan. My investigation into how this change came about leads me to believe that the WV Development Office is going to European Union countries and accepting (or recruiting) projects that are

too polluting to be built and operated in Europe. Are they advertising our lax environmental regulations? It certainly looks that way to me. If so—and I believe it is—we are foreclosing any opportunity for health and prosperity in the place I love and the place where I was born. 🌿

## Membership Chair Needed

After the move of our Membership Chair out of state, the WV Chapter of Sierra Club is looking for a volunteer who will work with other Chapter leaders to support and strengthen our membership base.

According to the Chapter's bylaws,

**“The ExCom shall provide for a membership program that keeps a copy of the roster of current members, assists in efforts to recruit and retain members, and is responsible for recruiting and welcoming members and encouraging them to participate in Club and Chapter activities.”**

If you would enjoy spending a few hours a month working with Sierrans from all over the state, please contact Aileen Curfman at [acurfman@gmail.com](mailto:acurfman@gmail.com).

**We send our thanks to Laura Yokochi for her hard work over the past several years. We are sad to lose her, but we wish her much happiness in her new home!**



### With your help we can clean up our water

**Sierra Club Water Sentinels are the first line of defense of America's waters. We live on the water planet. However, water is a finite resource with only about 1 % of the world's water actually being available for human consumption. Water pollution & over-use are threatening both the quality & quantity of our water resources at an alarming rate.**

**Keep our water safe. Join Sierra Club.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_

Check enclosed. Please make payable to Sierra Club  
 Please charge my:  Visa  Mastercard  AMEX  
 Cardholder Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_  
 Signature \_\_\_\_\_

| Membership Categories | Individual                       | Joint                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Special Offer         | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 15   | N/A                              |
| Standard              | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 39   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 49   |
| Supporting            | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 75   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 100  |
| Contributing          | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 150  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 175  |
| Life                  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 1250 |
| Senior                | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35   |
| Student               | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35   |
| Limited Income        | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 25   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$ 35   |

Join today and receive a FREE Sierra Club Weekender Bag!



Contributions, gifts & dues to Sierra Club are tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to SIERRA magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.



F94Q [W5700] 1

Enclose a check and mail to:  
 Sierra Club, PO Box 421041  
 Palm Coast, FL 32142-1041  
 or visit our website: [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)



# Bumps in the Road: Mail Delays Foil ExComm Elections

CANDICE ELLIOTT,  
CHAPTER ELECTIONS COMMITTEE



While WV Chapter bylaws compel us to hold annual elections in the fourth quarter each year for the purpose of selecting new members to alternating two-year terms on our Chapter and Group Executive Committees (ExComms), 2020 presented several obstacles to that objective.

Though nominating committees were chosen mid-year, both the Monongahela (Mon) Group and Chapter committees struggled to find enough willing and able candidates to hold a valid election, the goal being to have at least two more candidates than positions to fill. Some who were asked to run had too many other responsibilities or too much uncertainty due to the pandemic to feel they could give the position the attention they thought it deserved. And without in-person events to meet and get to know new activists, the candidate pool from which to draw seemed more limited than usual.

Nevertheless, the Mon and Eastern Panhandle groups were given a deadline for presenting their slates of candidates so that at least the Group ballots could be included in the Winter newsletter to save on postage. With creative help from Jen Rolston (Eden Design, Inc.) and Laura Lowther (Progressive Printing), we were able to print and mail three versions of the Winter *Mountain State*

*Sierran*. Eastern Panhandle members received a newsletter containing that group's ballot, Mon Group members were sent the newsletter with their ballot, and remaining Chapter members received a newsletter with alternate content. All newsletters were printed and taken to the Martinsburg post office in a timely manner, with a seemingly large cushion for members to receive their ballots before the return deadline.

As the newsletters were mailed from Martinsburg, members in the Eastern Panhandle received their Group ballots without incident. However, the remaining newsletters had a more challenging journey. The U.S. Postal Service had to delay delivery of bulk mail in December due to reduced staffing (thanks to COVID and Trump) and an increased number of packages, exacerbated by more Federal election ballots being mailed and more holiday gifts being shipped. Although the Postal Service eventually caught up, the Mon Group ballots didn't start arriving in members' mailboxes until after the deadline to mail them back had passed.

Since only three candidates had been found to run for two open positions on the Mon Group ExCom, and one member with a year left on their term subsequently decided to resign, the existing ExComm decided to

simply appoint all three candidates to the new ExComm. An email notice was sent to Mon Group members alerting them there was no need to return their ballots. The composition of the new Mon Group ExComm is reflected in the Directory on p. 2.

In the meantime, with holidays, Capitol riots, and change of administration preoccupying the chapter nominating committee, it took some extra time to assemble a slate of candidates to run for the four expired terms on the Chapter ExCom. Those ballots were printed and went to the post office on Feb. 4. Every member household in the WV Chapter should receive a paper ballot in the mail. Whether it arrives before the March 5 return deadline has yet to be determined, but no matter what, every individual who agreed to put their name forward and accept responsibility for helping to keep the WV Chapter of Sierra Club relevant and effective deserves our respect and appreciation.

**You can demonstrate your respect by completing and returning your Chapter ballot as soon as you receive it.** 🍀

---

## Eastern Panhandle Group Election

BY CHRIS CRAIG

The Eastern Panhandle Group's (EPSC) election suffered less from US Mail woes than did the Chapter and Mon Group elections (see *Bumps in the Road*, above). But as in those elections, the lack of live meetings and outings due to COVID-19 made finding new nominees to serve on the Group ExComm difficult.

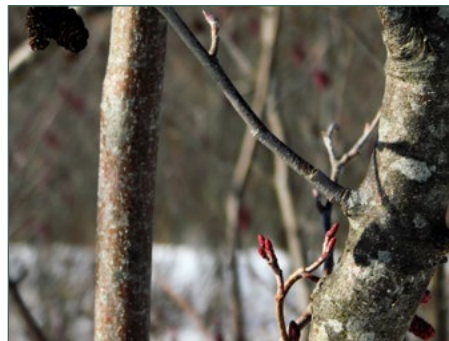
Fortunately, all incumbents with terms ending in 2021 agreed to run and serve again. The once and future slate of officers can be found in the Directory on p. 2. They continue to address conservation and Club issues in the Eastern Panhandle at their monthly Zoom meetings. Any member interested in attending should contact chair Gail Kohlhorst to receive meeting links.

Thanks goes out to EPSC officers and to all those who voted in the Group election.

# Virtual Sierra Club Outings to Debut in West Virginia

BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN

So far 2021 has delivered hope in the form of climate aspirations and calls for unity. Who has spring fever? The seeds of our collective activism are sprouting. There is a lot of work ahead for activists in the new year. With COVID-19 still a concern, the Sierra Club is extending its restriction for in person meetings and events through July 4. We have been brainstorming ways to connect members in new ways. This Spring we will introduce Virtual Outings. The outings will be available to view on the Monongahela Group's Facebook Page (Mon-Group-of-the-WV-Sierra-Club) and possibly other websites. The purpose of the outings is to introduce members to outdoor recreational experiences they may not have been aware of. We have some ideas ready, but would love input from more members. The more voices that we share, the greater our outreach. There are many Sierra Club members involved in amazing projects or who are talented photographers, artists and writers. We would love for you to share with us. Activism has many faces. Please email me (adrienne\_epley@yahoo.com) with any ideas or submissions. If you have a place in mind for a virtual outing, please let me know! I am excited to explore our new National Park! (See [New River Gorge](#), p. 1.) We want to include all parts of our beautiful state.



*Early signs of spring, even in the snow.*

PHOTOS BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN

## In-Person Outings Remain On Hold

The Sierra Club has extended its COVID-19-related ban on outings and other in-person meetings through July 4, 2021. Though we miss meeting friends old and new for those social, outdoor, and conservation-related gatherings, we understand the prioritization of health during these uncertain and frightening times.

To help in the interim, see Adrienne Epley Brown's call for *Virtual Outings* that she'll be launching in the near future. Watch for this opportunity to *remotely* explore some of West Virginia's outdoor wonderlands. And perhaps you'd like to help by sharing your own adventures as well.

Also, America's newest National Park (see p. 1) and other public lands within or near the Mountain State remain open and available for you explore alone, with family, or with friends in your "bubble." The C&O Canal (see [C&O Canal story](#), p. 14) is one of those spaces—right across the Potomac River for many WV Sierrans.

So stay safe, but continue to enjoy, explore, and protect our precious public lands!



# C&O Canal NHP Celebrates 50 Years



*Today only the ruins of Lock 33 lie along the C&O Towpath across the Potomac from Harpers Ferry. But back in the day it was a busy transportation link.*

One of the things that makes the Eastern Panhandle a great place to live or visit is its proximity to National Parks. One of these, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park, turned 50 years old on January 8. And though this long park/towpath lies across the Potomac River in Maryland, its impact on West Virginia's economy, recreation, and history is immense.

West Virginians in large numbers use the C&O Canal NHP to hike, bicycle, or paddle. They eat, drink and shop in Canal Towns, enjoy scenic views, and take pleasant drives along adjacent backroads.

West Virginians also benefit economically from the C&O. The National Park Service reports that the C&O had 5.1 million visitors in 2019, making the park one of its busiest units. Those visitors spent \$98.4 million, helping to generate \$142.8 million in economic output. While the Park Service doesn't estimate where that money was spent beyond Maryland or the District of

Columbia, we know that C&O visitors eat and stay on both sides of the Potomac River—especially in Shepherdstown, Paw Paw, Bolivar, and Harpers Ferry.

For instance, in 2019 the C&O Canal NHP counted 742,000 trips across the Potomac on the Byron Bridge pedestrian pathway between the towpath and Harpers Ferry. This made it the busiest entry point along the towpath's 184-mile route, eclipsing even Georgetown or Great Falls. And while the six-month breach of the bridge's access (due to a train derailment) in 2020 likely reduced that trip count, many locals have observed that the bridge has had some of its busiest days ever since July, as tourists and hikers sought places like the C&O to exercise and enjoy nature after the isolation of a pandemic-induced house-bound spring.

Historically, the Canal's direct impact on what is now West Virginia began in 1833 when the C&O Canal opened and commenced service just across the Potomac from Harpers Ferry,

winning its race with the B&O Railroad to that location by one year. Construction and operation of the Canal brought new capital and an influx of Irish laborers and other new residents. Manufacturing and trade upstream in Shepherdstown boomed a couple years later when a cement plant and grain warehouse along the canal made that town one of the busiest along the route.

Increased trade and transportation meant new links with Washington and the industry and population centers downstream. And though the C&O's impact would soon be eclipsed by a rapidly expanding network of B&O and other rail lines, the canal would continue to provide transport for charcoal, agricultural goods, and later coal.



**BY CHRIS CRAIG**



Still, the Canal's riverside path made it vulnerable to the ravages of frequent flooding that affected towns along the Potomac. The cycle of damage and reconstruction led the company into bankruptcy after the great flood of 1889. And another flood in 1924 proved so extensive that it wasn't worth the repair necessary to reopen the aging transportation system. The old line lay fallow for nearly a half century.

During the Great Depression, the National Park Service gained ownership of the C&O corridor and eventually devised a plan to turn it into a motor parkway—think Skyline Drive or George Washington Parkway. Conservationists, however, had other ideas. Members of the Audubon Society, Wilderness Society and National Parks Association banded together to promote the idea of a linear nature park that could be used by hikers, bicyclists and canoeists. They found a champion in Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas.

In addition to his long and influential service on the Court, Douglas was an environmentalist and outdoorsman. He served on the Sierra Club's Board of Directors, hiked the entire Appalachian Trail, and wrote extensively to preserve wild lands and rivers. As a frequent hiker on the C&O Canal towpath, he saw the value in preserving the corridor as a natural park. In March 1954 he enlisted journalists

and others to join him in a walk of the entire towpath, hoping that through their reporting the public would become acquainted with the nature and history of the C&O. Largely as a result of a groundswell of support generated by the hike and the subsequent sympathetic editorials in the Washington Post, the Park Service would establish the C&O Canal National Historical Park in January 1971.

Given that we've had 50 years to enjoy walks, bike rides and exploration of history and nature along the towpath, it seems fitting that we celebrate the C&O's anniversary with a year-long celebration. Jefferson County Convention and Visitor's Bureau will be joining with the Maryland Office of Tourism and towns along the C&O to mark the birthday with special recreational and educational events and the World Canal Conference (Aug. 30-Sept. 2, Hagerstown, MD).

Although plans for some town-sponsored events remain tentative due to COVID protocols and concerns, a brewery trail, ice cream trail, and specialty sandwich trail are in the works, and hotels, outfitters, and merchants will have special offers to encourage visitors to share in the "C&O Canal Experience" with short and extended trips. A juried photo contest and exhibit are being planned, and warmer weather may bring inter-town hikes and bike rides. Keep an eye out for the fun at [www.canaltrust.org/50th](http://www.canaltrust.org/50th). 🍃

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.

EDITOR: **Chris Craig**  
ccraig@laurellodge.com

COPY EDITOR: **Sara Torres**  
svtorres@ucla.edu

DISTRIBUTION: **Candice Elliott**  
candice.k.elliott@gmail.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN: **Jen Rolston**  
jen@edendesignco.com

PRINTING: **Progressive Printing**  
info@progressive-printing.com

Please contact the Editor for submission guidelines or advertising rates. Contributions to the newsletter may be sent to [ccraig@laurellodge.com](mailto:ccraig@laurellodge.com).

---

**DEADLINE FOR THE 2021 SUMMER ISSUE:  
MAY 1**

---

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



Over 50 West Virginians showed up on New Year Day 2019 to hike the C&O Canal towpath near Shepherdstown. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG



## Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

PO Box 4142

Morgantown, WV 26504

[sierraclub.org/west-virginia](http://sierraclub.org/west-virginia)

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

## Spring 2021



This newsletter is printed by Progressive Printing in Martinsburg, WV on 100% post-consumer, recycled paper, using vegetable-oil-based inks.

## Chapter ExComm Meeting

The next meeting of the WV Chapter of Sierra Club Executive Committee will be held online at **10 am, Saturday, March 13.**

Contact Co-chair Aileen Curfman at [acurfman@gmail.com](mailto:acurfman@gmail.com) for an invitation and the link.



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

## A Will is a Way

Make a commitment to the next generation by remembering Sierra Club in your will. Your support will help others preserve the intricate balance of nature

Sierra Club  
Gift Planning Program  
85 Second St, Second Floor • San Francisco, CA 94105  
(800) 932-4270 • [gift.planning@sierraclub.org](mailto:gift.planning@sierraclub.org)

### Public Officials

#### U.S. SENATE

Washington, DC 20510

#### The Hon. Joe Manchin (D)

(202) 224-3954  
[manchin.senate.gov](http://manchin.senate.gov)

#### The Hon. Shelley Moore Capito (R)

(202) 224-6472  
[capito.senate.gov](http://capito.senate.gov)

#### U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Washington, DC 20515

#### The Hon. David McKinley (R, 1st)

(202) 225-4172  
[mckinley.house.gov](http://mckinley.house.gov)

#### The Hon. Alex Mooney (R, 2nd)

(202) 225-2711  
[mooney.house.gov](http://mooney.house.gov)

#### The Hon. Carol Miller (R, 3rd)

(202) 225-3452  
[miller.house.gov](http://miller.house.gov)

#### WHITE HOUSE

Washington, DC 20515

#### Comments Line

(202) 456-1111

#### Fax

(202) 456-2461

#### Capitol Switchboard

(202) 224-3121

#### WV STATE LEGISLATORS

Member, WV Senate or House of Delegates  
Bldg 1, State Capitol Complex  
Charleston, WV 25305

**WVlegislature.gov** has contact information for all state legislators.

(877) 565-3447 or (304) 347-4836

#### GOVERNOR JIM JUSTICE

State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305  
(888) 438-2731 • [governor.wv.gov](http://governor.wv.gov)