

M Mountain State Sierran

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Clearcutting Almost Heaven



April 21 rally to protect the Upper Cheat River old-growth forests. PHOTO BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON.



BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON

On Earth Day 2022, President Biden issued an executive order directing the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to protect mature forests, in large part due to their carbon storage and climate benefits. The agency has so far done little to implement the order. Part of the USFS remit is to generate income from the sale of lumber. So, they have an incentive to fell trees of all ages.

U.S. forests sequester 10% of our carbon emissions every year, safely storing it in their trunks, branches, and soil. Mature forests and trees are doing the bulk of this work across federal lands. They can do much more if they're allowed to keep growing. However, the **Upper Cheat River Project (UCR)**, part of the 2006 Land and Resource Management plan for the Monongahela National Forest, will clearcut 3,463 acres of mature hardwood

trees. Two-thirds of the targeted stands are more than 100 years old, with some trees older than 200 years. The Sierra Club, as part of the Climate Forest Coalition, has identified this project as one of the twelve worst logging projects in the country.

The UCR project claims that felling old-growth trees will improve the health of the forest by creating openings and varying tree ages to improve structural diversity across the forest

landscape. But 61% of the UCR project area is privately owned, with extensive industrial clearcutting operations. Thus, the overall forest landscape is already structurally diverse. The mature forests and wildlife habitat on USFS lands are therefore even more important as a buffer against the surrounding fragmentation and degradation and for providing older-aged forests. Ultimately, this project is more about commercial logging than it is about improving the health of the forest or benefitting the wildlife and people who live there.

- UCR plans to clearcut 3,500 acres of forest. Clearcutting steep slopes greatly increases the likelihood of **flooding**, as seen most recently in the Leadmine and Horseshoe communities.
- Heavy rainfall on steep slopes will cause **erosion** from logging roads and exposed ground, which will pollute streams. The project area has over 148 miles of native brook trout streams. The sediment and warming water from the loss of shade will

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SIERRACLUB.ORG/WEST-VIRGINIA

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR:

The West Virginia Chapter Needs You!



BY JIM KOTCON

As a volunteer organization, the WV Chapter depends on—you guessed it—volunteers. We are only as active as our volunteers. There are a number of ways that new and long-time members can get more involved. Most of them are actually a lot of fun!

Volunteers lead outings. We do ask that outings leaders get some basic training and co-lead an outing with a seasoned outings leader—and more outings leaders means we can schedule more Sierra Club outings. This is not only fun, it is a core mission of the Sierra Club. People do not fight for lands they do not know, and outings to our special places may someday pay off with volunteers willing to step up to protect them.

Volunteers are critical to our conservation goals, whether that means protecting wild lands, keeping water clean, saving endangered species, or fighting climate change. No one can solve all the problems in the world, but perhaps you can help with a solution to one problem at a time.

Volunteers keep the Chapter running. Join a membership committee, help with a fund-raising drive, or do something as simple as sending a photo to this newsletter!

A lot more good gets done when we say, “I must do something,” than when we complain, “Why doesn’t someone else do something?” Contact me or other leaders in this issue’s directory if you’d like help.

ASF Grants Awarded Spring 2023

The Appalachian Stewardship Foundation (ASF) has chosen its grant recipients for spring 2023:

- \$50,000 has been awarded to **Appalachian Mountain Advocates of Lewisburg** for the organization’s Energy Accountability Project.
- **Downstream Strategies of Morgantown** received \$50,000 so support microgrids in small towns across West Virginia.
- **Three Rivers Waterkeeper of Pittsburgh, PA** was awarded \$35,000 to support work in pollution accountability and advocating for healthier headwaters of the Ohio River.

ASF was created in 2011 as a result of a settlement with Longview Power that set up a mitigation fund to correct the damage to the environment caused by the mining and burning of coal. To date, ASF has awarded more than 1.3 million dollars in funds to promote its mission.

West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Directory

Email contact for all officers and staff: sierraclub.wv@gmail.com

Term ends at first meeting of indicated year.

CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Jim Kotcon, Chair	(*24)	304-594-3322
Kevin Campbell, CCL Delegate	(*25)	304-613-4099
Aileen Curfman, Conservation	(*25)	304-314-2709
Robert Griffith, Vice Chair	(*24)	304-282-0543
Maura Ross, Political	(*24)	
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David Sturm	(*25)	304-612-0024
Maggie Loudon, Secretary		
Candice Elliott, Treasurer		

MONONGAHELA GROUP EXCOMM

Adrienne Epley Brown, Chair & Outings	(*25)	
Michael Attfield, Vice Chair, Chpt Delegate	(*24)	
Jim Kotcon	(*25)	304-594-3322
James Lamp, Political	(*24)	304-244-9257
Betsy Lawson, Secretary, Membership	(*24)	304-983-2980
Sally Wilts, Treasurer		304-379-7567
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EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM

Chris Craig, Co-Chair & Outings	(*24)	304-433-1260
Aileen Curfman, Co-Chair & Treasurer	(*24)	304-314-2709
Roz Eiler, Webmaster	(*25)	540-931-5906
Gerald Hatcher, Conservation	(*24)	304-240-8614
Regina Hendrix	(*25)	304-725-0223
Maggie Loudon, Secretary & Chpt Delegate	(*25)	
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Chris Craig, Newsletter & Outings	304-433-1260
Mel Waggy, Public Lands & Membership	304-497-4358
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Karen Yarnell, Wilderness	

REGIONAL SIERRA CLUB ORGANIZING STAFF

Bill Price, Eastern Region Senior Organizing Mgr	304-389-8822
Karan May, Senior Campaign Representative	304-356-8774
Alex Cole, Senior Organizer,	304-767-8687
Beyond Coal/Beyond Dirty Fuels	

Gather with Fellow Sierrans at New River Gorge at June 10 Picnic

The West Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club is celebrating America's newest National Park with a free picnic for members, supporters, friends, and guests on June 10, 2023, at the Grandview #4 Shelter in the New River Gorge National Park.

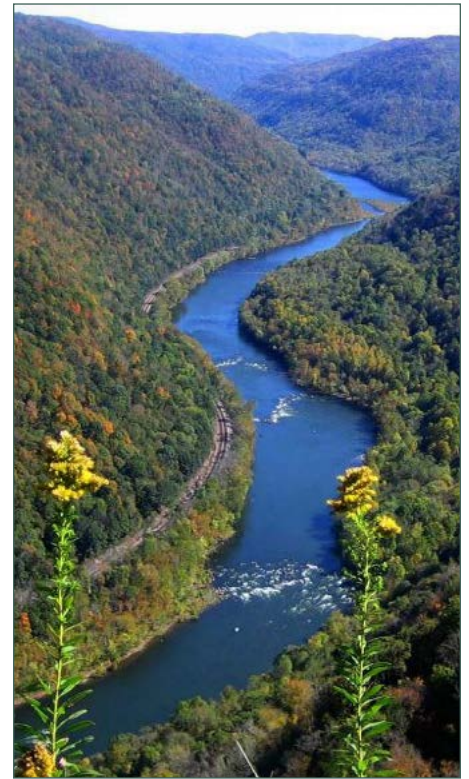
The Chapter will provide perishable foods, saving you the need to transport food safely. Please bring a nonperishable item to share—buns, condiments, chips, dessert, alcohol-free drinks, a watermelon to slice at the park, or similar items.

At 10 am, Outings leader Chris Craig will lead a hike starting at the shelter. (See Outings listing for June 10.) Meanwhile, the charcoal grill will be fired up in anticipation of good things to come.

We'll start gathering at the shelter around 11 am, and the meal will be served at noon. When we're comfortably full, we'll enjoy some entertainment and a speaker from the National Park Service. There will be a variety of activities and games, and the shelter playground beckons young picnickers with energy to burn. We'll wrap up around 4 pm and vacate the shelter at 5 pm.

Consider spending the night in the area so you'll have more time to explore this scenic addition to the National Park System. Primitive camping is available free, first-come-first-serve. Pay camping is available nearby at Little Beaver State Park. Motels and other lodging are also available in the area.

For directions and to learn more about the venue, check out the Grandview page of the New River Gorge NP's website: www.nps.gov/neri/planyourvisit/grandview.htm. To RSVP or to find out more about this event, email sierraclubwv@gmail.com.



Grandview: Once a WV State Park, now one of the most scenic areas of New River Gorge National Park and Preserve.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS.

Mobilize For Climate Investments!

BY JIM KOTCON

The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act has literally billions of dollars for federal investments in clean energy and climate pollution reduction. Over 400 separate grant programs are funded by this bill and by the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law).

We know the climate crisis will require fast action to prevent dangerous interference with the climate system, and these programs provide a path forward. But fast action is needed, and it is time for state and local communities to take advantage of these funds as quickly as possible.

The Sierra Club is launching a new effort to build teams of volunteers to work in local communities to make this happen. You can get your local community and county leaders to start on the path toward energy efficiency and renewable energy, develop a community forestry program, or work toward environmental justice in your own backyard.

Yes, this will help the climate, but it also builds teams of like-minded people in your community. And it builds relationships with local political leaders. (Bringing federal money for projects in their districts will make almost every politician happy with you!)

Time is short—some of these programs are already underway, and others will open soon. For details on what you can do, contact Jim Kotcon at jkotcon@gmail.com.



RATE INCREASES FOR FIRSTENERGY CUSTOMERS COMING:

Transfer of Pleasants Power Plant Moving Forward

BY JIM KOTCON

In late April, the WV Public Service Commission (PSC) approved FirstEnergy's plan to move forward with a Letter of Intent to acquire the Pleasants power plant. This 1300-MW, coal-fired power plant was partially owned by MonPower until it was transferred to FirstEnergy's Ohio subsidiary, who later transferred it to another spin-off, Energy Harbor. Energy Harbor was losing money on the plant and transferred it to Texas-based ETEM in 2022, then leased it back to operate until May 31, 2023.

But earlier this year, the WV Legislature urged FirstEnergy to repurchase the plant, and the PSC directed FirstEnergy to evaluate whether acquisition was feasible. In March, FirstEnergy submitted a Plan to the PSC to pay to keep the plant open for one year while they conducted the detailed analyses needed.

The PSC held a hearing in April to hear evidence on the transfer. The Sierra Club argued that this was a bad idea—bad for ratepayers, bad for the environment, and not even a particularly good deal for the workers or the community.

Most interesting was the candid testimony from FirstEnergy. When asked how much ETEM paid for the plant, FirstEnergy admitted that old coal plants lose money, and they had to pay ETEM to take the plant. They further testified that the Pleasants power plant has no coal supplies coming this year, they do not have the pollution permits needed to operate the plant, and upgrades needed to operate the plant may cost as much as \$500 million. If the deal is finalized, MonPower and Potomac Edison customers will pay these costs.

FirstEnergy also testified that they do not need the plant. They currently operate the Harrison and Fort Martin plants, and if the purchase of Pleasants goes forward, they would likely close Fort Martin. But some political leaders have argued that all these plants should be kept open. Extending the life of Fort Martin would likely require an additional \$500 million to install improved nitrogen oxide pollution controls.

What's Next?

The PSC ordered FirstEnergy to negotiate a "Letter of Intent" with ETEM within 30 days. If approved by the PSC, as seems likely, MonPower and First Energy customers would be expected to pay an additional \$36 million to keep the Pleasants plant operational, even though it would not be generating any electricity. If a final

deal is negotiated, there would be additional hearings and a public comment period later this year to approve the transfer and operating costs for the plant.

The PSC based their decision on the finding that the Pleasants power plant is needed to assure reliability of the electric grid. But the regional grid operator (PJM) had already determined that the closure of Pleasants would not affect grid reliability. The Pleasants plant is simply not economically competitive, and the regional grid already has excess generating capacity.

What We Want

The Sierra Club is urging the PSC to reject the transfer. Instead of asking ratepayers to keep throwing good money after bad by trying to keep coal plants open, the PSC should require utilities to invest in a Just Transition for coal communities. A fraction of the hundreds of millions of dollars needed to keep these plants operational could create an economic development plan for communities and create long-term careers for current workers. Significant funding is available through the federal Inflation Reduction Act to transition energy communities and re-develop energy infrastructure toward more sustainable uses.

Other intervenors argue that the PSC does not even have legal authority to require utility ratepayers to subsidize the operation of an independent merchant power plant. The PSC is supposed to regulate public utilities, not privately-owned merchant power plants.

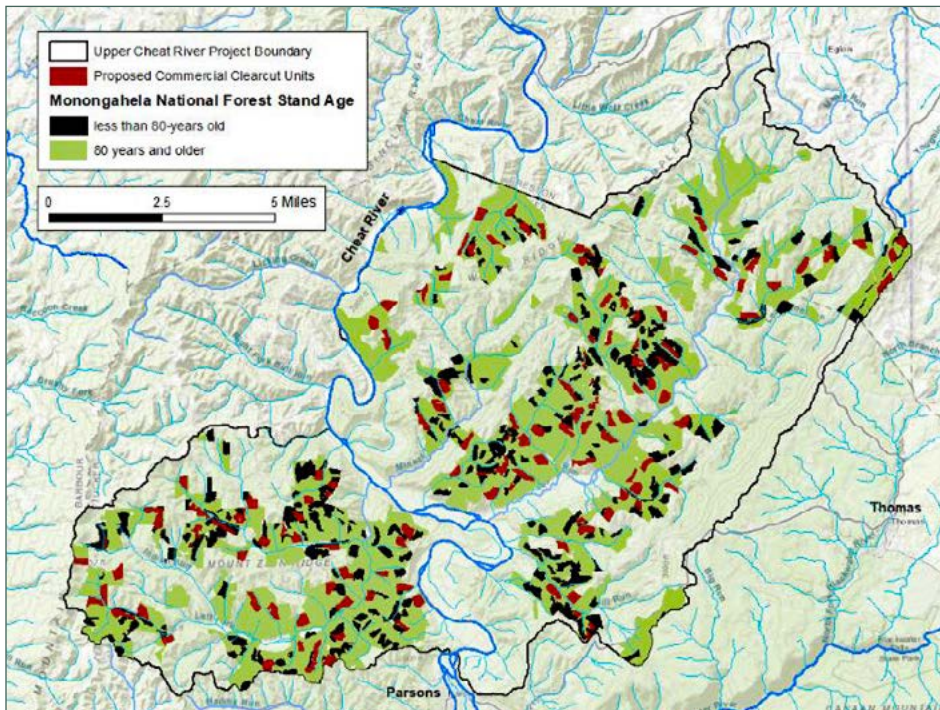
WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ask the PSC to oppose the Pleasants transfer and instead require a community transition plan:

- Refer to Case No. 22-0793, and submit comments by writing to: Karen Buckley, Executive Secretary, Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 812, Charleston, WV 25323.
- Or submit on-line at: <https://tinyurl.com/pleasants-comments>. It would help to send a copy of your comments to WV legislators as well!

For more information, contact:

Jim Kotcon at jkotcon@gmail.com.



CLEARCUTTING | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

degrade this valuable habitat. Sediment will also impact the drinking water supplies that local communities rely upon.

- Clearcutting on steep slopes will require logging helicopters brought in from Colorado that will cost more than sales of the lumber will generate, resulting in a **loss of \$1.4 million** taxpayer dollars. Even the WV Forestry Association thinks this is a bad method.
- The openings left by the clearcutting also create a niche for **invasive weeds** to move in. The USFS will use herbicides to control weeds.
- In addition to brook trout, three species of endangered bats, hellbenders, and cerulean warblers will be impacted by the further loss of old-growth trees.
- Standing timber stores carbon both above and below ground. Harvesting timber releases carbon.

West Virginia was, until 1880, a vast area of virgin forest. In 1770, George Washington, while traveling along the Kanawha River, wrote in his journal of seeing a sycamore tree with a 45-foot girth. Today there are a mere 263 acres of virgin forest left of the original ten million acres. Roughly 80% of the state is now reforested, but very little is old-growth forest. Since two-thirds of the targeted stands in the UCR Project are over 100 years old and likely are exhibiting old-

growth characteristics, they should be left to grow rather than be cut down.

On November 14, 2022, activists including Sierra Club members held a rally in front of the USFS office in Elkins to protest the Upper Cheat River Project. About 50 people turned out, mostly locals who had already experienced flooding from previous clearcuts. Also present were counter-protesters from the WV Forestry Association. Their argument, as always, was about protecting their jobs. Unlike coal mining jobs, how many logging jobs are disappearing?

On April 21, 2023, another rally took place in Morgantown to urge people to protect old-growth trees. If West Virginia is almost heaven, it's because of the Monongahela National Forest. We must protect it. 🌿

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact President Biden and the U.S. Forest Service to urge them to follow through on the executive order to protect our mature forests and stop the clearcutting of our Upper Cheat River old growth trees.

- www.whitehouse.gov/contact/
- www.climate-forests.org/take-action
- cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=58364

COMMENTS NEEDED

Climate Forests

BY JIM KOTCON

The Climate Forests Campaign is a coalition of hundreds of organizations nationwide, including the Sierra Club, who advocate for keeping mature forests intact for their climate benefits.

Almost everyone knows that trees absorb carbon dioxide through photosynthesis. What is not as well-known is the emerging science that demonstrates that mature trees and undisturbed forests capture and sequester the most carbon. This is not just a federal issue—the WV Chapter has been working to protect areas here in WV. The Monongahela National Forest has some of the most endangered lands in the nation, and proposed timbering will threaten wildlife habitat, exacerbate flood risks, and, of course, interfere with the carbon capture capacity of these lands.

In 2022 President Biden issued an executive order directing the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service to inventory and protect mature forests for their climate benefits. But the agencies have been slow to implement that order, and in the meantime, many areas are being timbered. Nationally, carbon losses from logging are up to five times higher than from fire and other natural disturbances.

But finally, a draft rule or proposed rule is available for public comment. You can submit comments through the Climate Forests website at <https://www.climate-forests.org/take-action>, and they have sample talking points and background info.

Do something for forests today!

2023 Legislative Recap

BY LUCIA VALENTINE,
WEST VIRGINIA ENVIRONMENTAL
COUNCIL LOBBYIST

Despite a challenging legislative landscape, the WV Environmental Council, along with our membership organizations, had some notable victories and defeated several harmful pieces of legislation during the 2023 session.

Representing our member groups at the Capitol, along with my colleagues Maria Russo and Jillian Welsh, was an honor. Thank you for letting us be your voice at the legislature, and thank you for using your voice to reach out to your legislators. It helps to move the needle more than you know.

GOOD BILLS THAT PASSED

PFAS Protection Act (*HB3189*). This bill provides the next steps for the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WV DEP) to conduct follow-up studies and create action plans to address PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances or “forever chemicals”) at the source.

HB3110 passed, creating consistent annual funding to hire more inspectors and properly manage wells at the WV DEP’s Office of Oil and Gas (OOG). It will use 0.75% of the severance tax revenue (capped at \$1.2 million) and the tiered fee structure (based on how many wells each producer has) to double the present OOG funding, increasing the number of inspectors (responsible for covering over 75,000 wells) from 10 to about 20. While this is a step in the right direction, it is still an inadequate number of inspectors per well. We will continue to advocate for additional funding to ensure the safe and responsible maintenance of this growing

industry.

SB468 continues developing the Cabwaylingo State Forest Trail System for off-road vehicles, while prohibiting WV Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from “establishing any additional ATV, ORV, or UTV trail systems within state parks and state forests.” While connector trails from Cabwaylingo will allow ATVs, ORVs, and UTVs, we were thrilled to defeat any further expansion of these vehicles on our state’s public lands. Legislators said they got more calls on this issue than any other! Thank you!

BILLS OF CONCERN THAT PASSED

HB2814 creates a Hydrogen Power Task Force. While the original bill included the words “clean hydrogen,” meaning hydrogen made through electrolysis powered by renewable energy, the final passed version struck the word “clean,” suggesting hydrogen produced by fossil fuels.

SB161 and *SB162* allows DNR to “lease state-owned pore spaces in certain areas for carbon sequestration.” These bills make way for large projects across the state, including a future hydrogen hub.

BILLS OF CONCERN THAT DID NOT PASS

We successfully worked to stop several bills of concern from passing. The range of bills included legislation that sought to expand nuclear energy (*HB2896*), limit carbon capture agreements by making changes to the Managed Timberland Program (*HB3294*, *SB595* and *SB739*), give the coal industry significant tax exemptions (*HB3304*, *HB3133*,) and exempt energy generators from local control (*HB2459* and *HB3446*).

GOOD BILLS THAT DID NOT PASS

Two community solar bills introduced this session, *SB627* and *HB2159*, were introduced with bipartisan support but were tabled in



Maria Russo (L) and Lucia Valentine, WVEC Lobbyists, at the Capitol in Charleston.

PHOTO BY JILLIAN WELSH.

favor of passing an expanded Power Purchase Agreement bill. The WVEC, in partnership with West Virginians for Energy Freedom, created a community solar campaign that will educate legislators and the public on the benefits of community solar to build for the 2024 legislative session.

The Orphaned Well Prevention Act, *SB109* and *HB2852*, would have required oil and gas companies to cover the costs of plugging their wells. Orphaned wells often leak dangerous emissions, like methane and hydrogen sulfide, which lower property values, pollute groundwater, and threaten public health. We will continue to monitor the implementation of the incoming federal

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The West Virginia Environmental Council will host its annual meeting November 3 - 5. More details to come!

Please join us for Environmental Day (E-Day) 2024 at the State Capitol on February 13, 2024!

E-Day is an excellent opportunity for environmental groups and community members to network, feature their work and meet with legislators!

monies allocated to West Virginia to aid in plugging orphaned wells. The fight is ongoing, and we expect similar legislation to be introduced again in 2024 as the state works to solve its orphaned and abandoned well crisis. In partnership with the West Virginia Sierra Club, we have launched our 2023 Energy Campaign, which aims to garner grassroots and legislative support for plugging orphaned wells.

If you are interested in participating in our Community Solar and/or 2023 Energy Campaign, please reach out to luciavalentine10@gmail.com! We welcome volunteers to write op-eds, attend in-district legislative meetings, and more. **Thank You!**

Overall, we are satisfied with the bills we helped to stop or amend to lessen their harm. In a year with new legislators, a new supermajority, and a political climate that does not lend itself to advancing environmental protections, we are encouraged to see our proactive approach to several bills prevail as we managed to pass legislation that will protect West Virginians and our environment for decades to come.

While there is still more work to be done, there is power in this movement, and we look forward to working year-round to build momentum for the 2024 legislative session and to shape our legislative priorities.



Morgan King, Climate Campaign coordinator for WV Rivers talks about the PFAS Protection Act with an E-Day participant, Feb. 28 at the State Capitol, Charleston.

PHOTO BY JILLIAN WELSH.

2023 Victories at the Capitol

Passed HB 3189

HB 3189, the PFAS Protection Act, provides steps for the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WV DEP) to conduct follow-up studies and create action plans to address the public health threat of PFAS or "forever chemicals" at their source.



Passed HB 3110

HB 3110 secures more funding for the WV DEP's Office of Oil and Gas. Creates consistent annual funding to increase the number of inspectors from 10 to around 20 to oversee the state's 75,000+ wells.



Re-amended SB 468

SB 468 continues the Cabwaylingo State Forest Trail System while prohibiting DNR from "establishing any additional ATV, ORV, or UTV trail systems within state parks and state forests." While connector trails from Cabwaylingo will allow ATVs, ORVs, and UTVs, further expansion of these vehicles on our state's public lands was defeated.

Defeated HB 2896

HB 2896 would have made WV an Agreement State with the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. It passed the House but died in Senate Finance. We successfully removed section F (allowing WV to store nuclear waste) but were glad the state legislature did not take on the over \$9 million program.



Defeated HB 3294 and SB 595

HB 3294 and SB 595 would have changed the Managed Timberland Program and effectively killed the opportunity and incentive for WV landowners to enter into carbon capture agreements, which enables landowners to practice stewardship and gain forestry support to maintain their managed timberland.

COURTESY WVVEC.



Three from the Eastern Panhandle at E-Day at the Capitol, Feb. 28: (L to R) Sharon Helman, EP Green Coalition; Marie Uehling, Jefferson County Vision; and Chris Craig, EP Sierra Club. PHOTO BY MARIE RUSSO.



EXPERIENCING WEST VIRGINIA'S WILDERNESS AREAS: **Dolly Sods and Otter Creek**

BY AILEEN CURFMAN

In 1975, eleven years after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law, Dolly Sods and Otter Creek were designated as West Virginia's first two wilderness areas. Both areas lost their old-growth forests over 100 years ago, but both are now dramatically scenic and are heavily visited. Don't expect to spend a weekend without seeing other visitors.

Dolly Sods is in a high, windswept location. After the trees were felled, a fire destroyed much of the soil. The area is now an otherworldly landscape of blueberry heaths and rock outcroppings, with patches of spruce and deciduous forest. Forty-seven miles of trails provide moderately easy, (but wet) hiking. The Bear Rocks Scenic Area is a much-photographed site that has been featured in national publications through the years. The primitive Red Creek Campground is nearby.

Dolly Sods takes its name from a German sheep farmer, Dahle, who once lived in the area. It now consists of more than 17,000 acres and is entirely in the Cheat/Potomac Ranger District of Monongahela National Forest in Tucker and Randolph Counties. Road access is from Laneville Rd. (CO45), Jordan Run Rd. (CO28/7), and the junction of FR19 and FR75.

Otter Creek is nestled between two mountains and offers a rich, second-growth deciduous forest, with spruce at higher elevations. Numerous fords ensure an adventure for those hiking Otter Creek's 47 miles of trails.



ABOVE: Enjoying a hike at Dolly Sods Wilderness Area: (L to R) Kristan Phillips, Mary Beth Ross, and the author. TOP: Dolly Sods Wilderness at Sunset. CREDIT: AHEFLIN, GETTY IMAGES

Otter Creek covers nearly 20,700 acres of the Cheat/Potomac District in Monongahela National Forest in Randolph and Tucker Counties. Trailhead parking is available on several roads, including FR701 near Parsons and FR91 near Alpena.

Aileen Curfman's coverage of Wilderness areas will continue in the fall issue of Mountain State Sierran with other West Virginia areas and what you should "Know Before You Go."

Wilderness for All: The Story of the Wilderness Act



BY AILEEN CURFMAN

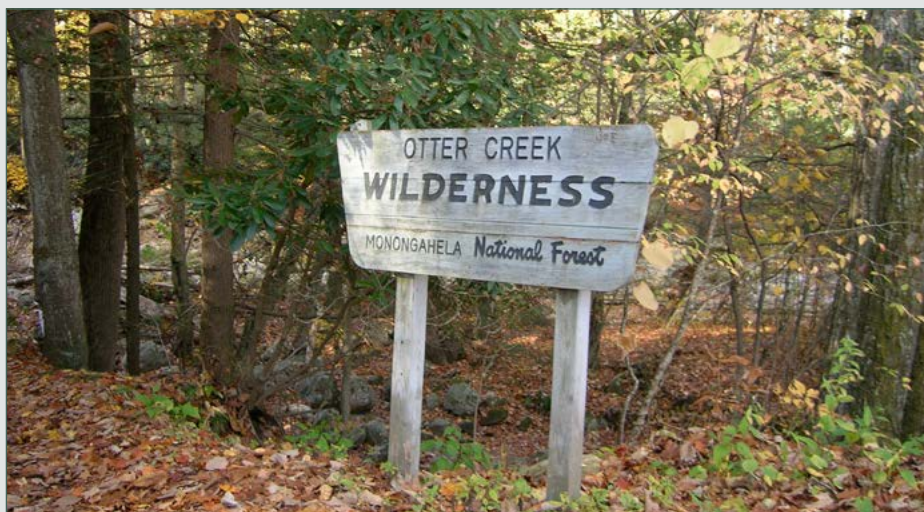
Americans of European descent have traditionally (and problematically) viewed areas not inhabited by Europeans as a “frontier,” a place of unlimited opportunities. Beyond that frontier, they believed, lay a vast “wilderness” unknown to white settlers. In the 1950s, long after the frontier was gone, many Americans still held to this notion of a wilderness that defined the character of the United States.

But during that same decade, the United States experienced an immense build-out of infrastructure. Housing subdivisions, shopping centers, and the new Interstate Highway System were rapidly filling up previously undeveloped areas. Increasingly, Americans lamented the loss of wilderness.

Meanwhile, the use of pesticides had increased rapidly in agriculture, in mosquito eradication programs, and in home pest control methods. Rachel Carson’s classic, *Silent Spring* (1962), explained how use of the pesticide DDT was causing the loss of many birds, including the bald eagle, symbol of our nation.

The loss of open space and the loss of our birds spurred proposals to set aside some tracts of land that would remain forever wild. There was vehement opposition from mining companies, timber companies, and similar businesses whose profits depended on resources extracted from these public lands. But many Americans loved the notion of designating some areas as wilderness.

As early as 1892, the Sierra Club had begun advocating for protections like those provided in the Wilderness Act. Another early voice for wilderness was heard in 1935, when the Wilderness Society was formed as an “organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom and preservation of the wilderness.” Howard Zahniser, a leader in the Wilderness Society, was a Pennsylvanian who was passionate about wilderness preservation. In 1956 he drafted a bill that would preserve wilderness areas across the United States. Zahniser’s bill



The FR701 entrance to Otter Creek’s 20,700 acres of wilderness area. PHOTO BY JEN ROLSTON.

underwent 16,000 pages of testimony presented at 18 public hearings. The bill was rewritten or resubmitted 656 times.

Later that year, Congress finally passed the Wilderness Act, with broad bipartisan support, and on September 3, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law. The act permanently preserved nine million acres as wilderness. The same year, Congress established the Land and Water Conservation Fund to provide for management of the new wilderness system.

Today, 111.7 million acres make up the National Wilderness Preservation System, a network of more than 800 designated wilderness areas that are co-managed by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To provide access to these and other public lands, the Great

American Outdoors Act of 2020 supports increased public access to and protection for federal public lands and waters at no cost to taxpayers.

If you haven’t yet experienced any of West Virginia’s wilderness areas, you have plenty of time to learn about them and prepare for a visit.

TO LEARN MORE:

- www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wilderness
- content.sierraclub.org/outings/national-outings/50-years-wilderness
- www.wilderness.org/about-us/our-team/our-history

EPSC Program Shines Light on Solar



BY MAGGIE LOUDEN

Abundant interest in solar energy in the Eastern Panhandle was evident at the Eastern Panhandle Sierra Club's (EPSC) program on solar energy March 28. Mike Studholme of Mountain View Solar (<https://mtvsolar.com>) delivered his "Solar 101" program in Martinsburg.



Mike Studholme of Mountain View Solar gave EPSC program attendees an introduction to home and business solar panels, including their benefits and how to make the transition from grid-produced power.

PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

Studholme began by presenting the benefits of using solar energy to power our homes and businesses:

- Solar power is plentiful. Every hour enough solar radiation strikes Earth's surface to satisfy the global power demand for one year.
- Solar power is local. It can be produced where it is needed.
- Solar power helps flatten the demand curve (the sum of all demands for electricity in a market at any given time).
- Solar is a domestically produced power source in the U.S.

Interest in home solar panels is booming. Studholme attributed this to new federal credits that help defray the initial expense of panel installation. This credit means that typical households can get a return-on-investment in ten to twelve years, followed by essentially free energy over the expected system lifetime of 40 years.

Transitioning to solar power gives homeowners energy independence. They

essentially own their power source, reducing dependency on fossil fuels—and the nation's dependency on imported energy. In addition, new developments in battery technology have made solar energy with backup storage a source of energy that can power one's home when the grid is down.

Home- or business-based solar energy is a job creator, since panels are installed by building and electrical contractors. Because it produces zero greenhouse emissions, solar panels can be part of a homeowner or business's sustainability strategy to lower both their energy costs and carbon footprint.

Studholme said the potential benefits of solar energy installed in a home are both economic and environmental. With the right system and circumstances, homeowners can both lower their electricity costs and shrink their carbon footprints. Solar energy also uses little to no water, in contrast with nearly all power plants that produce energy from steam. No moving parts means that energy produced from solar panels is silent. Finally, they require little maintenance.

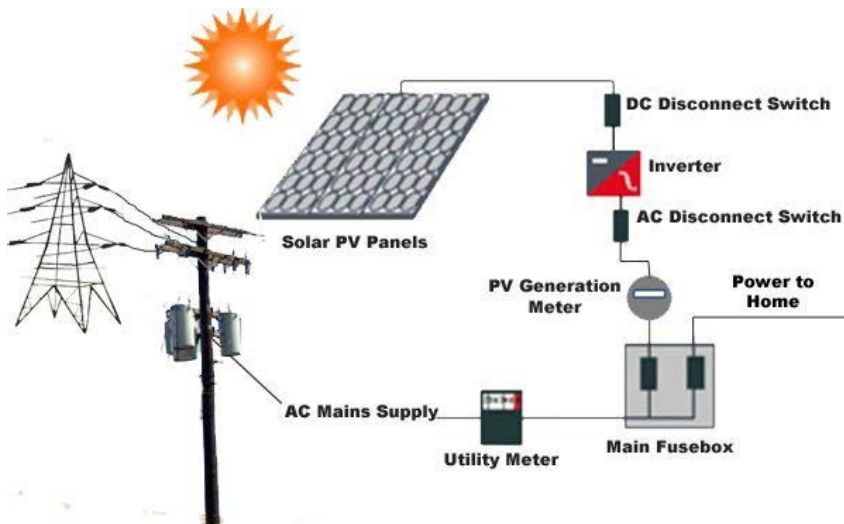


DIAGRAM – COURTESY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW SOLAR.

EPSC hosts programs at 6:30 pm, on the fourth Tuesday of every other month in the annex of St. John Lutheran Church, 101 Martin Street, Martinsburg.

The next program, on May 23, will be on stormwater management, featuring David Billmyer, Berkeley County Public Service Stormwater District.

For more information on EPSC's programs or its other activities, contact Maggie Louden at maglouden@gmail.com.



Mon Group Conservation Chair Marly Ynigues shows her colors at the April 22 Touch the Earth Festival in Marilla Park, Morgantown. The group worked with other local conservation groups to sponsor a species scavenger hunt to raise awareness about erosion in the area watershed. PHOTO BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN.



Riverfest 7 in Buckhannon, August 26

Riverfest 7, a memorial celebration in honor of the late April Pierson-Keating, long-time Sierra Club activist, will be held at the Riverwalk in Buckhannon on Saturday, August 26, from 10 am to 4 pm.

There will be door prizes, food, live music, kayak, canoe and stand-up paddleboards for rent, shuttle service to the Hampton launch ramp on the Buckhannon River, vendors, exhibitors, educational activities for kids, yoga, and an interfaith water blessing.



April Pierson-Keating (1967-2019), Sierra Club activist and founder of Preserve Our Water Heritage and Rights, is remembered at Buckhannon's Riverfest each year.

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE?



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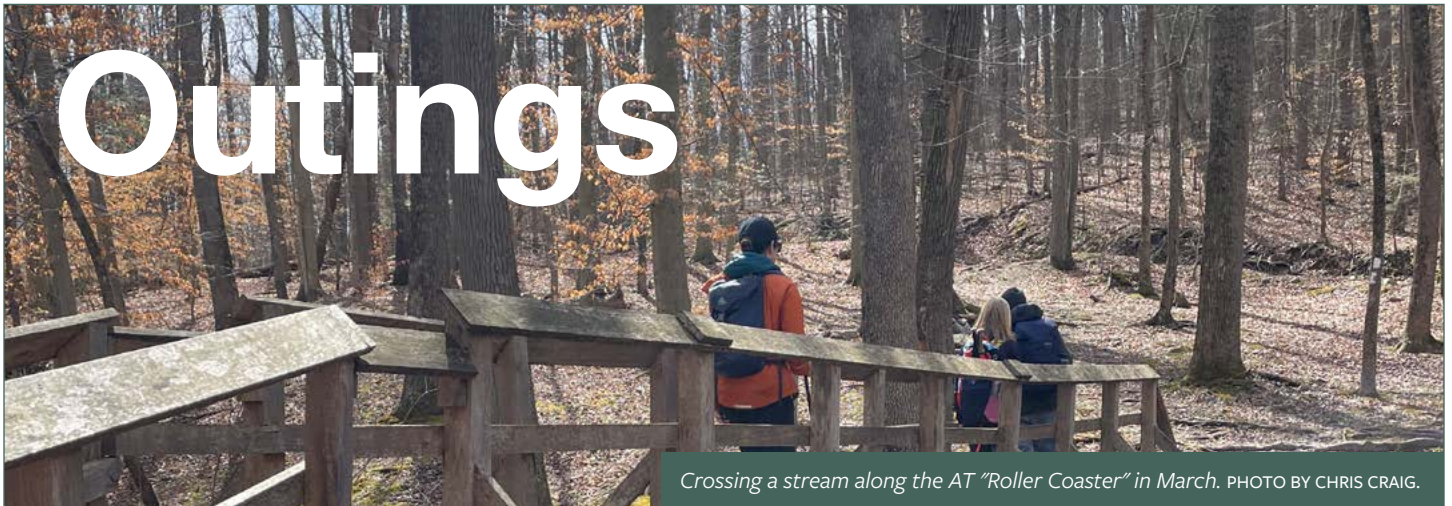
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Outings



Crossing a stream along the AT "Roller Coaster" in March. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

Sunday, May 21, 2023

DAY HIKE: Quebec Run Mill Run Trail

The Quebec Run Wild Area is located along the eastern slope of Chestnut Ridge, in Fayette County. This heavily forested 7,441-acre area extends eastward to Big Sandy Creek. Nearly all of the Quebec Run and Tebolt Run watersheds are encompassed by the Wild Area. No development of a permanent nature is permitted in this area, in order to retain the undeveloped "wild" character. The general public can use the area for hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and the pursuit of peace and solitude. Big Sandy Creek and Mill Run are stocked with trout, and the lower reaches of Quebec and Tebolt Runs contain native trout. The forest is mixed mesophytic, with maples, yellow-poplar, hemlock, pitch pine, and mixed oaks occupying varying moisture and sunlight zones. Underbrush, including rhododendron, mountain laurel, dogwood, sassafras, and greenbriar occur throughout. The forest is mostly third growth, resulting from extensive timber harvesting by the Summit Lumber Company in the late 1930s. Many of the old logging roads and tram roads are visible, along with dark brown sawdust piles that give mute testimony to the once-active portable sawmills.

Distance/ 2.5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 2 hours

Bring: Snack, water, sunscreen, and shoes for the varied terrain

Meet: 12 pm. Mill Run Parking Lot, 633 T345 (Quebec Rd.), Farmington, PA. Between US40 and PA43, 27.4 miles southwest of Farmington.

Leader: Adrienne Epley Brown
adrienne_epley@yahoo.com
702-465-9119

Nearest town: Farmington, PA

Cancellation policy: We will carry on in drizzle but postpone in case of a downpour.

Additional information: A detailed area map can be found at <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateForests/FindAForest/Forbes/Pages/Hiking.aspx>

Saturday, June 3, 2023

DAY HIKE: Antietam National Battlefield

This hike is open to all. It will be a moderate hike on the northern section of Antietam Battlefield. We will meet in the parking area of the Visitor Center. Our hike will take us through the West Woods, the Corn Field, Mumma and Roulette farms, and Bloody Lane trail before returning to the Visitor Center.

Distance/ 5 miles

Difficulty: MODERATE

Duration: 2 hours

Bring: Water, snacks and footwear appropriate for the conditions.

Meet: 10 am, Antietam National Battlefield Visitor Center, 5831 Dunker Church Rd., Sharpsburg, MD.

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

Nearest town: Sharpsburg, MD

Cancellation policy: We will cancel for heavy downpour or thunderstorms.



ABOVE: Mon Group explored West Virginia Botanical Gardens on this February hike. Although blooms were few, the trails and woodlands still yielded plenty of interest. PHOTO BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN.

LEFT: Nine Sierrans braved a chilly morning that turned into a perfect April Fools Day at Shockey's Knob, Berkeley County, WV. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.

Sierrans explored Cool Springs Nature Preserve near Charles Town on a cool, spring day. Potomac Valley Audubon owns and manages this preserve, which has trails, facilities for educational programs, and precious marshland habitat like here along Bullsken Run. PHOTO BY ED WHEELLESS.



Saturday, June 10, 2023

DAY HIKE: Grandview Area Trails, New River Gorge National Park and Preserve

This hike is planned in conjunction with the WV Sierra Club's summer picnic at the Grandview area. (See announcement, p. 3.) We will piece together several NPS trails on a moderate pre-picnic hike of 2 miles and an easy post-picnic hike of 2.5 miles. Join us for some or all. Grandview offers unsurpassed views of the deepest section of New River Gorge. The morning hike will include towering fortress-like rock walls, exposed coal seams, rock tunnels, and a large rock overhang. The afternoon hike will include an easy walk to the dramatic Turkey Spur overlook followed by a loop through rolling forest that features a diversity of flora.

Distance/ Difficulty: 5.5 miles/MODERATE (with shorter distances possible)

Duration: 3.5 hours for total hike

Bring: Water and protection from sun.

Meet: Morning hike at 10 am. Afternoon hike directly after picnic. Grandview #4 Shelter, New River Gorge National Park. From I-64, take exit 129 to Grandview Rd. Go north 5 miles and follow signs to shelter #4.

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

Nearest town: Beckley, WV

Cancellation policy: We will carry on in light rain but cancel if downpours are expected.

Wednesday July 16, 2023

EVENING HIKE: Cooper's Rock Ice Cream Social and Rock City Trail

This gathering is an opportunity to meet Sierra Club members and learn about our work in the community while enjoying homemade ice cream. The social begins at 5 pm. We will be located at Picnic Shelter 2, adjacent to the visitor's center, overlook, and playground. At 6 pm we will begin the hike to the Rock City Trail. This easy-to-moderate trail runs from picnic shelter 3 through the area known as Rock City.

Distance/ Difficulty: 1 mile
EASY

Duration: 1 hour for hike

Bring: Snack, water, sunscreen, and shoes for the varied terrain.

Meet: 5 pm at the Shelter 2 located by the Cooper's Rock Overlook, Coopers Rock State Forest. (Follow signs from I-68 exit 15.)

Leader: Adrienne Epley Brown
adrienne_epley@yahoo.com
702-465-9119

Nearest town: Morgantown, WV

Cancellation policy: We will hike in drizzle but postpone in case of a downpour. The ice cream social will be held rain or shine.

Additional information: <https://wvstateparks.com/park/coopers-rock-state-forest/>

Coopers Rock State Forest

Coopers Rock State Forest is named for Coopers Rock, a series of sandstone cliffs above the Cheat River Gorge. Legend has it that a fugitive hid near what is now the overlook. A cooper by trade, he continued to make and sell barrels from his mountain hideout. During the 1800s the iron industry flourished in the area that is now Coopers Rock. Today the remains of the Henry Clay Furnace—the first steam-powered blast furnace in western Virginia—is a popular hiking and biking destination in the forest. The forest proper was established in 1936. Many of its structures, including the main overlook, picnic shelters, and superintendent's house, were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. Eleven of these structures have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

SOURCE: WEST VIRGINIA STATE PARKS



On a February hike along the C&O Canal towpath, a few hikers took a detour to explore Killiansburg Cave, where some citizens of Sharpsburg, MD took refuge during the 1862 Battle of Antietam. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

Saturday, July 29, 2023

DAY HIKE: Appalachian Trail, Ashby Gap to Manassas Gap, VA

We will continue our exploration of the AT in Northern Virginia with this hike rugged but rewarding section. Going through Sky Meadows State Park and other public land, it features expansive views from open pasture land, interesting rock formations, and a rich variety of flora, including orchards, forests, and wildflower meadows. This hike is suitable for individuals in good shape. It will involve a shuttle, so please reserve your space and let us know well ahead of time if you must back out. There is no charge for this hike, but contributions are welcome.

Distance/ Difficulty: 11.8 miles MODERATELY DIFFICULT

Duration: 7 hours

Bring: Water, lunch and snacks, protection from sun and bugs, especially ticks.

Meet: 9 am. AT Trailhead parking off VA 725, 0.1 mile north of its junction with VA 55. From I-66, take exit 13 onto VA 55 at Linden, VA.

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

Nearest towns: Linden, VA

Cancellation policy: We will carry on in light rain but cancel if downpours are expected.

Saturday, August 12, 2023

DAY HIKE: Yankauer Nature Preserve, Berkeley County, WV

Yankauer Nature Preserve is a woodland preserve of Potomac Valley Audubon Society. This hike is open to all. It will be an easy, two-mile hike on gently rolling hills. We will meet in the parking lot for the preserve. On this hike we will have some good views of the Potomac River.

Distance/ 2 miles

Difficulty: EASY

Duration: 2 hours

Bring: Water, snacks and shoes appropriate for a woodland hike.

Meet: 10 am, Yankauer Preserve parking area, 438 Whittings Neck Road, Martinsburg, WV.

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

Nearest town: Martinsburg, WV

Cancellation policy: We will cancel for heavy downpour or thunderstorms.

Nine Sierrans showed up on a blustery, cold March day to hike the 14 Appalachian Trail miles from Snickers Gap to Ashby Gap, Virginia. Most of this stretch falls in the trail section known as the "Roller Coaster," offering lots of challenging climbs and descents. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



Saturday, August 19, 2023

DAY HIKE: Bolivar Heights-Schoolhouse Ridge North, Harpers Ferry NHP

This hike covers the site of the most significant Civil War action in Harpers Ferry and the largest surrender of US troops prior to World War II. It also takes us through woodland, meadows, and areas with expansive views of hills and rivers. The hike is suitable for adults and children (accompanied by adults) capable of earthen trails on rolling terrain. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome. There is no charge for the hike, but contributions are welcome.

- Distance/** 4 miles
Difficulty: MODERATELY EASY
Duration: 2.5 hours
Bring: Water, a snack, and protection from sun.
Meet: 9 am, Harpers Ferry Middle School, 1710 W. Washington St., Harpers Ferry (Bolivar). Park in school lots in back of the school but meet on foot in front (facing Washington Street).
Leader: Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260
Nearest town: Bolivar and Harpers Ferry, WV
Cancellation policy: We will carry on in light rain but cancel if downpours are expected.



Saturday, September 23, 2023

DAY HIKE: Tuscarora Trail, Sleepy Creek WMA, Berkeley County, WV

Our exploration of the Tuscarora Trail in West Virginia continues with this hike from Hampshire Grade Road to Upper Campground, on Sleepy Creek Reservoir. This hike is on rolling, forested trail and old roads. It crosses streams and offers views of rock outcroppings. It will involve a shuttle, so please reserve your space and let us know well ahead of time if you must back out. It is suitable for those in reasonable shape and able to handle hills and uneven terrain. There is no charge for the hike, but contributions are welcome.

- Distance/** 5 miles
Difficulty: MODERATE
Duration: 3 hours
Bring: Water, lunch, and protection from sun and bugs, especially ticks. Hiking poles or staffs may be helpful for stream crossings and uneven terrain.
Meet: 10 am. Hampshire Grade Road at the Tuscarora Trail. Take WV 45 to Glengary, turn right on CR 7, and go 4.5 m. to Shanghai. Turn left on Hampshire Grade Road (WV 7/13) and go 4.5 m. up the mountain. There is parking along the shoulder. We will shuttle in some of the vehicles to the start of the hike.
Leader: Chris Craig
ccraig@laurellodge.com
304-433-1260
Nearest town: Glengary and Shanghai, WV
Cancellation policy: We will carry on in light rain but cancel if downpours are expected.

LEFT: *Discovering a children's wigwam at Cool Springs Nature Preserve, near Charles Town, on a cool April DAY. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.*

BELOW: *The Mon group exploring cairns and winter woods on a hike in late February.*

PHOTO BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN.



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

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**DEADLINE FOR THE 2023 FALL ISSUE:
AUGUST 5, 2023**

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



Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

SUMMER 2023



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Chapter ExComm Meeting

The next meeting of the WV Chapter of Sierra Club Executive Committee will be held online at **9:30 am – 12:30 pm, Saturday, August 5.**

Email sierraclub.wv@gmail.com or call 304-314-2709 for more information or to receive the link.

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