Come explore a little known part of Tennessee’s wilderness and history for a great weekend this coming October while you meet others from across the state that share your same concerns! Pickett State Park, our state’s first park built by the CCC and located on the Kentucky border north east of Jamestown, lies within the 19,200-acre Pickett State Forest, right next to the massive 125,000-acre Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area. And Pickett is the first state park in the southeast to be certified a Dark Sky viewing location by the International Dark Sky Association, so pack your binoculars.

If you arrive on Friday, plan to chat with other participants, and we’ll have a variety of games and cards and/or choose to explore the park home and mill of WWI hero Alvin C. York; exploring an English settlement in nearby Rugby; experiencing the fall colors at their best as you hike Saturday and/or Sunday to the large rock houses and natural stone bridges that are a special feature of Pickett or hike the John Mur Trail along the Big South Fork of the Cumberland River. Something for all skill levels!

We’re excited to welcome National Sierra Club’s state lobbying expert, Jen Hensley, National Sierra Club State Lobbying and Advocacy Director of State Governmental Affairs. Jen will join TN Sierra Club Conservation Lobbying Day on Saturday to assist the most interested how-to’s on impacting legislation the Club is working on and the important bills the Club has positions on before the TN General Assembly. Following Jen’s program will be a strategy and planning session for the upcoming 2018 season, including our revamped Conservation Lobbying Day.

We’ll be planning the constituent mobilization effort needed to reach all our legislators for Conservation Lobbying Day, so please plan to attend the afternoon lobbying sessions so that you can be prepared to be a leader in your area. We – and the environment – need you! (And of course there will be more training later this winter.)

Other fun and additional training activities will also be held Saturday:
- No Sew T-shirt Bags, Alice Demetree: Recycle an old T-shirt. Ones with a favorite picture you hate to give up but faded or stained, are the perfect choice.
- We will make reusable bags using only a pair of scissors.
- “Communicating as One Club” Workshop, Cliff Cocksburn, et al.

This interactive training will focus on national SC initiatives and best practices in the areas below and leveraging the Ladder of Engagement in keeping with Chapter Best Practices. These include: General communications; Media relations; Campaign outreach (including social media.) Materials will be drawn from national tools that have been developed and deployed to help Chapters connect the dots from the aforementioned points of focus while highlighting connections to overarching tasks such as: Intersectionality; connecting the dots between issue campaigns; developing constructive alignment with national priorities; moving from transactional mobilization to transformational organizing; attending to SC national best practices of utilizing succession planning, volunteer recognition, strategic prioritization, etc.

“Slime,” Alice Demetree: Alice is bringing materi- al to make “Slime” which is geared for anyone from 3 to teens (and older kids!) If it’s a rainy day, we’ll break it out! And if you are bringing kids, you could want to pack some indoor toys/activities in case of rain too.

Various Sierra Club committees will also meet – feel free to sit in on any or all of interest to you.

There’s also our annual Silent Auction, benefitting our Chapter’s lobbying and legislative programs – and an evening bonfire with S’mores, of course!

Lodging is in 6 heated cabins/bunkhouses that accommodate about 20 each, so we can have separate families, couples, mens and womens cabins.

Camping among the surrounding trees is another popular option (cost for the weekend is the same for camping on the grounds or for staying in the cabins.) You need to supply your own bedding, towels and personal items.

Everyone signs on to helping with at least 1 chore during the weekend (meal prep, serving and cleanup) and general cleanup of the facility before we leave.

Breakfasts on Saturday and Sunday, and Saturday night dinner are provided. Be sure to indicate whether you are vegetarian or omnivore. You are on your own for Friday dinner, and your trial lunches. If you wish additional beverages, you’ll need to bring your own.

Early Bird Registration Price until October 20: $50/adult
Regular Registration Fee: $60/adult
Students: $15
Single day only price with meals: Sat - $30; Sun - $10
Day only, no meals: $5
(Children 15 and under attend free!)
Special: ½ off for first-time attendees!

Note: a limited number of partial/full scholarships are available by request - make your needs known as you register with Barbara Hurst.

How to Attend:
1. Make your reservation by e-mail or phone to: Barbara Hurst, Cherokee Group Treasurer barbaraduckhurst@hotmail.com or 423-886-9503 OR use our new on-line registration form at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/3753359/?Fall-2017_Sierra-Club-Retreat you must register each person separately.
2. Tell how many adults/children in your party, when you plan to arrive, and whether people are vegetarian or omnivore for meal planning.
3. Pay on arrival at the Retreat!
4. You will receive a detailed schedule of events closer to time.

The Cherokee Group looks forward to hosting you!
- Contact Cocksburn: 140 to Exit 317, Hwy. 127 north (46 miles). Turn right on Hwy. 154, travel 12 miles to the park entrance, pass the main office and continue on, taking a right on the Group Lodge road. OR, I-75 north from Knoxville to Exit 141, Hwy 63 to Huntsville. Right onto Hwy 27 north to Obed. Left onto Hwy 27 through Big South Fork NRA, Right onto Hwy 154, follow to Pickett State Park, pass the main office and continue on, taking a right on the Group Lodge road. For emergencies the Park’s office number is 931-879-5821. Further details about Pickett State Park and surrounding activities are available at: http://tn.gov/environment/parks/Pickett/
Tennes-Sierran
The bi-monthly newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club.

SEND CHANGE OF ADDRESS TO:
*Email: address.changes@sierraclub.org
*Snail Mail: clip the “Moving?” coupon on page 8 and mail
*Address changes are processed much faster if you include your Sierra Club membership number. To find your membership number, look on the address label. Please notify the Editor when changes are needed.

SEND ARTICLES TO:
E-mail: sierratnnews@gmail.com

ARTICLE SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:
Submission Target Date is September 30th for the November/December 2017 issue.
1. E-mail and e-mail attached files are preferred. Send to sierratnnews@gmail.com either with embedded text messages, or attached files. Attached files are preferred. Word is preferred but Apple users may send articles in Pages.
2. Photographs should be scanned in .jpg or .tif file format then either attached to e-mail or mailed via U.S. Postal Service on a 3 1/2" diskette or CD ROM. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope if you would like your diskette or photo prints returned.
3. Hard-copy handwritten or typewritten articles may be accepted: however, pre-approval from the Editor is required.
4. Any materials submitted via USPS mail will not be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided.
5. Concerns or complaints should be addressed to: Tennessee Chapter Ombudsman, Joel Gearhardt at jgearhardt@yahoo.com. The opinions expressed in the Tennes-Sierran are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the Tennessee Chapter, or the Sierra Club.

“Every good thing, great and small, needs defense” — John Muir
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Contributions, gifts and dues to Sierra Club are not deductible as charitable contributions for Federal income tax purposes. Your dues include a $5.00 for a subscription to Sierra magazine and $1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

To join, send the completed form (below) with your payment to: PO. Box 43614, Tulsa, OK 74142-6147.

Meeting Schedule

Chapter Meeting Location Dates
Fall Picket State Park October 27-29
Winter Cedars of Lebanon State Park January 26 - 28
Spring NB Forrest State Park April 27-29
Summer Cedars of Lebanon State Park Aug 3 - 5

Sponsors

Art: Frazzle! by Bill Marinelli

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Content: Changes made during production will be noted in the next issue.

Meeting Schedule

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Fall Picket State Park October 27-29
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Target Date for the November/December Issue is September 30, 2017.

All meetings and outings notices, articles, and photographs should be in by then.

Send material to Sinclair Sparkman at sierratnnews@gmail.com
Speak out for nature: Volunteer as a guest classroom speaker

By Joy Mayfield

For the past 10 years I’ve been volunteering in local public and private schools as a guest classroom speaker. I want to share this experience with you as a way to encourage YOU to do the same.

Let me state from the start that I feel a moral responsibility to educate the next generation on behalf of the planet. After all, we will need them to carry the torch on our behalf when our time on earth is done.

If you have considered volunteering in schools but worry that your efforts will not be appreciated, rest your mind. I happen to know firsthand that teachers welcome anyone willing to share their time and knowledge with students. Teachers tell me that students are stimulated to learn just by having a fresh face before them. I have NEVER had an audience of kids that wasn’t both receptive and excited. Think how staggering it must be for a teacher to face 25-35 kids five days a week. I usually have to take a nap after only one hour of volunteering in the classroom!

Your presentations do not have to be technical nor long. Mine usually last between 40-50 minutes and always involve a hands-on activity toward the end. My simple mission is to get kids interested in being outside. We Sierra Club members should all be inherently pretty good at selling the outdoors to a new audience.

Whatever knowledge you possess about the natural world is bound to be impressive to a 3rd grader or, sadly, even a 12th grader so you need not worry about feeling inadequate.

Props are helpful. Remember show and tell? It is amazing what kids find fascinating. No, actually it isn’t. It is the same sort of thing we were interested in at their same ages.

If you’re volunteering with little ones, bring along a book to read suitable for the topic and their age. Kids still love someone reading to them. Bring animal or bird puppets, bird nests (I collect them in the wintertime), nuts, leaves and tree branches with lichen – anything from the yard ends up being intriguing to most kids. In my experience I have found children’s lack of knowledge of the natural world alarming. We can change that. Children, even teen-agers, are naturally inquisitive and eager to learn. We can open that door to the outside world for them.

Sometimes teachers even request field trips, which is certainly the ideal way to get kids excited about nature. Even a stroll around the school’s campus can be an enlightening experience for most kids. If your interest is butterflies, there are wonderful props available that don’t cost much. This spring I was able to speak to 5th graders from Clarksville on Monarch butterflies and happened to bring my Monarch Café (a netted cage my friend Betsy Garber gave me for Christmas) with me. I had 14 caterpillars in residence at the time, safely munching away on milkweed. At the end of my talk, as if on cue, one of the caterpillars took this opportune moment to spin and twist into a chrysalis. 160 students were mesmerized, speechless and in absolute awe at witnessing this marvel of nature. So was I!

The important point is that you do not need to be a teacher nor a naturalist nor a park ranger to share your knowledge of nature with school children. All you need is your own curiosity and sense of wonder and a willingness to devote a few hours of your time to a very deserving audience. You could be rewarded in ways you cannot imagine until you try it.

If you are interested in working in your local schools and need advice or guidance or even just a cheerleader, please contact me. I would be delighted to help. (615-681-5821 or joy.mayfield@comcast.net).

In closing I appeal to you to consider volunteering at one of your local schools. I can tell you that it will make you feel better in your soul. We may not be able to influence our elected officials in the current administration but we CAN reach out to the young and teach them about the great, green garden planet we love and seek to protect so earnestly.

**Comes with Guarantee: kids love it, teachers love it and you leave with your batteries on full charge.**
The public is very welcome at ALL Sierra Club Meetings and Activities! All members transition and the state should feel free to drop in and attend another Group’s meetings. You will find yourself among friends and learning something interesting.

Cherokee Group

September 5, 2017 – October 9, 2017 – 6:00 P.M. – Strategy/Business Meetings: Come and share your ideas, share your concerns as we resist, insist, persist and enlist! We’ve got committees on outings, programs, clean energy and climate, water quality, forestry issues, and parks/land protection with room to support YOUR concerns. Where: at our new location, Pilgrim Congregational Church, 400 Glennwood Dr., Chattanooga 37404 (at the corner of Glennwood Dr. and E. 3rd Street. Come in the front door! We’ll be in the parlor on the right. All are welcome!

Note: Our September Strategy Meeting will be held on Sept. 5th (the 1st Tues) to avoid meeting on Labor Day. Please meet at Bill Moll’s home, and enjoy his outstanding botanic gardens. Meet at 5 pm for a tour, and bring along a picnic supper. His address is 4918 Maltrow Dr., Red Bank 37415; call him at 423-702-5779 for directions. All are welcome!

September 25, 2017 - 7:00 P.M. - September Program: At our new location: the Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga, 3224 Navajo Dr., Chattanooga, TN 37411. Off I-24, just east of the Missionary Ridge Cut. Take the Germantown Road Exit, turn north onto Germantown Road, take the 2nd left onto Navajo, go about 1/2 mile, UUCC will be on your left, up the hill! David Loochbaum, “The NRC: Does It Have Your Back, or Does It Have Your Back Covered with a Target?” David, Director of the Nuclear Safety Project for the Union of Concerned Scientists, and a nuclear engineer by training, has worked in nuclear power plants for nearly 2 decades. He’ll be talking to us about the NRC’s process for shutting down an operating reactor for safety reasons – and the dilemma the NRC faces as it lacks the criteria for judging when a reactor is unsafe, though it claims it would not allow an unsafe reactor to continue operating. Come give your thoughts on how we might reach out to the NRC Chairmen and Commissioners about a lack of confidence in their role as the public safety’s guardian.

September 14, 2017 – 7:00 P.M. – Program: Reducing our Exposure to Toxics as we Build Healthy, Sustainable and Resilient Communities. Robert C. Wingfield Jr., Ph. D., Associate Professor of Chemistry, Fisk University, will discuss how participants can build healthy, resilient and sustainable neighborhoods, homes, and businesses while reducing their exposure to toxics. The presentation will include a discussion of the nexus of energy, water, food, material, and human health sustainability; as well as concepts and issues regarding environmental sustainability both locally and globally. Come at 6:30 to socialize, and the program will begin at 7:00 p.m. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. For more info contact Russ at 615-506-4070. The program is free and open to the public.

September 19, 2017 – 6:30 p.m. – Local Issues Meeting: Everyone is welcome at this local issues and business meeting. Come at 6:00 if you’d like to eat. We meet at House of Kabob, 216 Thompson Lane, Nashville. Please contact Charlie at (615) 500-5499 or cahigh1722@aol.com with any questions. Put “MTG Sierra” in the subject line. We look forward to seeing you.

November 9, 2017 – 7:00 p.m. – Program: Limestone Cedar Glades - Margie Hunter, author of Gardening with Native Plants of Tennessee, will present this program on limestone cedar glades. These Cedar Glades represent a unique habitat that achieves its richest expression in Middle Tennessee. Part of a mosaic of habitats based on shifting soil depths and canopy cover, the open glades contain numerous endemic species, including state and federally listed rare plants. This presentation will examine those characteristics that define habitats in the cedar glade complex and highlight some of the associated species. Come at 6:30 to socialize, and the program will begin at 7:00 p.m. at Radnor Lake Visitor Center. You must enter Radnor Lake from Granny White Pike, which may involve ignoring your GPS. For more info contact Russ at 615-506-4070. The program is free and open to the public.

Watauga Group (Northeastern TN)

Program and business meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. on the second Thursday near Doe Mountain Recreation Area from spring through fall at R&D Campground Pavilion at 900 Mining Town Rd., Mountain City, TN. During the winter time meet up at The Loft 5902 Hwy 421 south Mountain City. For more info contact Russ at 615-506-4070. The program is free and open to the public.
Outings

The Tennessee Chapter’s Outings and activities are always open to the public and members of the Club from across the state! Sponsored by our local Groups, pre-registration with the trip leader is a must for all outings.

September 9-17, 2017 - Drive Electric Week: The Cherokee Group is again sponsoring Drive Electric Week. On September 9th attend the Electric Tailgate Party at the Chattanooga Choo Choo – with ride-and-drives, information booths and more. Owners will be on hand to talk about their all-electric and plug-in hybrid cars, trucks and motorcycles. Electric Vehicles are less expensive and more convenient to fuel than gasoline vehicles, better for the environment promote local jobs, and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Are you considering going electric? Come talk to owners who have successfully done so! Watch for the specifics on our Facebook page and website. (Cherokee Group)

September 16, 2017 - Naturalist Ramble - Monarch Butterfly Migration Monitoring and Citizen Science, Cades Cove, GSMNP. Who doesn’t love running around in a sunny field with a butterfly net? Monarchs migrate en masse to Mexico every year for the winter, and we would like to learn more about their migration and population status by tagging them. Migrating monarch butterflies have been monitored in Cades Cove for many years. Participants also catch and identify other butterfly and insect species. We’ll set up on a spot in Cades Cove and catch butterflies from there. Bring a lunch since late morning to early afternoon is the best time. Families are encouraged to bring children along for a fun and educational day outside. You do not have to be a member of the Sierra Club to participate. One-way drive: 40 miles. Preregister with Mac Post: 865-806-0980; mpost3116@aol.com (email preferred). (Harvey Broome Group)

September 23, 2017 - Canoe/kayak Float - French Broad River. This go-with-the-current float covers 10.5 miles from the TN 66 bridge to the Seven Islands public access point on the French Broad. Though far from pristine, this river does have some interesting sights and a bit of wildlife (and some not-so-wild life). There may be some shoal water, but no whitewater. Basic canoe/kayak skills are required. Adverse wind conditions are another possible “hazard.” Sorry, but no non-human motorboats, so you will have to contact a local outfitter and make your own arrangements for boats, paddles, and pfds. One-way drive: 25 miles. Pre-register with Ron Shriver: 922-3518; ronshriver@gmail.com (email preferred). (Harvey Broome Group)

September 23, 2017 - Tennessee Riverwalk, 11:00 am: This month we’ll be walking downstream from the Bluff Grove Hollow to Emory Lane and enjoy lunch at Mr. T’s Pizza. We’ll meet at the Blue Goose Hollow Trailhead, the small park off Riverside Drive on the Riverfront (at the end of Martin Luther King Blvd.).) We'll take the Cameron Harbor Development, (for your GPS: 876 W 9th Ave, Chattanooga, TN 37402). Easy walking. Kids welcome. Bring friends! Pre-registration required, with John Doyal, 2ndoutdoorsch@gmail.com or 423-315-0965. (Cherokee Group)

September 30, 2017 - Backpack - Savage Gulf State Natural Area. If you like waterfalls and nice bluff vistas, this is a great backpack. Starting at the Zone 3 parking area in the Savage Gulf State Natural Area, we’ll take the relatively easy and flat 4.2 miles long Big Creek Rim Trail to the Alum Gap campground, stop-
Letter to the Editor
CONCERNING BEDFORD FORREST STATE PARK:

I have been pleased to observe that recent issues of the Tennes Sierran have included articles relating to the national political process and how it affects not only our environment, but our personal lives as citizens. Especially with the current administration, it is clear that forces opposing environmental improvement and quality are having a field day. I believe these same forces are determined to undo the concept of government as a key to improving the lives of people in our society especially those who are in need. In the past six months, reduction in healthcare coverage, voter registration regulation, disinterest in citizen involvement in decision making, dismissal of scientific evidence, abolition and reduction of regulatory oversight, and reduced taxes on the wealthiest Americans have become objectives of at least two branches of our government.

The article in the July/August newsletter concerning Bedford Forrest State Park asked for comments about the role that the Tennessee Chapter might play in considering a change of name for the park. Although I personally think this name change is appropriate and overdue, I do not think the chapter should take a leadership role on this issue. The chapter could support these efforts and express to park officials its concern about the facility name. Perhaps the Chickasaw group would be interested in working on this as well as finding another appropriate location.

Looking at the three clause Sierra Club national mission statement, it would be a stretch to find justification for the chapter to pursue a petition to the legislature. Perhaps, “to educate” would be the closest.

As it is, the Sierra Club has its plate full with work on various projects and legislative matters (statewide and locally). I think it would be awkward for Scott and others to add this issue to its agenda in dealing with state agencies and the legislature.

As a point of reference for those enamored with the Confederate legacy and the importance of “not forgetting” such history, I would strongly suggest reading Mayor Mitchell Landrieu’s powerful May 19 statement on the removal of Confederation monuments from prominent locations in New Orleans. A transcript of the speech is available here: http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2017/05/mayor_landrieu_speech_confeder.html

Keep up the good work on the newsletter.

–Bill Kornrich

Trump Admin Releases Report Trying to Justify Bailing Out Dirty, Expensive Power Plants

By Mary Anne Hitt

Late Wednesday, Trump’s Secretary of Energy Rick Perry released a controversial grid report in an effort to pressure market operators, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), and utilities to bail out aging coal and nuclear plants by forcing electricity customers to pay more for their expensive electricity. But the facts throughout the report don’t support those conclusions. To sum up the report in a tweet, Trump and the coal industry want customers to pay more for dirtier power. Meanwhile, most everyone else (including the Sierra Club) is making it possible for customers to pay less and get cleaner energy - something that is now a reality across this country.

Even before the report was released, its credibility was questioned by electrical engineers, policy experts, and electricity industry stakeholders as a political ploy by the Trump administration to prop up old dirty energy plants at the expense of the rapidly growing clean energy sector. Their suspicions were confirmed when a draft copy of the report was released early by nonpartisan Department of Energy (DOE) career professionals, and then quickly retracted by DOE’s political press office.

It’s disappointing – but not surprising – that Rick Perry took a well-crafted, insightful draft report from nonpartisan Departmen

ment of Energy professionals and tried to make it into a talking points memo for coal and nuclear subsidies.

The initial draft report was informed by studies from energy policy experts, major universities, and nonpartisan energy stakeholder reports. It found that wind and solar energy strongly contributed to the affordability, reliability, and resilience of the grid; lowered prices for customers; and would continue to grow rapidly into the future.

But some of this “new” report’s recommendations echo the unsubstantiated claim that coal and nuclear plants are needed for grid reliability, and recommend that rules be changed to compensate them regardless of their competitiveness against cleaner, cheaper, and more flexible energy sources like wind and solar. What’s more, buried in the report are statements claiming that wind and solar have not been a factor in coal and nuclear plant retirements - when in fact, those resources are playing a significant role in stabilizing electric prices and making utility bills more manageable for consumers. Joe Romm highlighted those and even more false claims in his column as well.

The report’s secrecy before its release has been unprecedented and even prompted the Sierra Club to file a lawsuit against DOE under the Freedom of Information Act for access to basic information on the report’s premises and consultations. Perry has refused input from clean energy jobs creators, outside energy experts, and even members of Congress. The report’s release is widely viewed as another instance of the Trump administration turning its back on basic transparency to the public.

The failed spin of this study is one more sign that the Trump administration is creating its energy agenda by looking in the rearview mirror, while clean energy passes them by in the fast lane. There is no evidence, in this report or elsewhere, that coal or nuclear plants are vital to our grid’s long-term reliability, or that there will be increasing demand for them. In fact, all trends point in the opposite direction.

This report is nothing more than a half-baked attempt by the Trump Administration and its dirty energy allies to assemble a flimsy rationale in hopes of pressuring FERC, grid managers, and utilities to bail out uneconomical, highly subsidized coal and nuclear plants.

The truth is simple: coal and nuclear can no longer compete on their own, and they are now pushing Trump to save them. This study is a shoddy attempt to do just that, and considering that the Sierra Club just marked the nation’s 257th coal plant retirement, it isn’t going to work.

What Happens to More than 400 Toxic Sites in a Hurricane?

By Bryan Parras

For as long as I can recall, the more than 400 chemical plants and oil and gas refineries that litter our community weren’t just an eyesore, as some may see them, they were the cause of hardship, of sickness, and even of death, polluting our air and dumping toxins into our water. Hurricane Harvey and the destruction it brought with it only magnified this threat. I’ve seen the black smoke burning off from these deadly and dangerous plants, I’ve smelled the oil and chemicals, and I know the fear that strikes so many of our communities on a daily basis. On normal rain events, we know that these facilities, which are decades old, have situations where they have to shutdown to prevent and avoid these catastrophic explosions and events. As you can imagine, Harvey is only making this worse.

Hurricane Harvey has already dumped more than 9 trillion gallons of water, enough water to fill the Great Salt Lake in Salt Lake City twice. Entire highways in Houston are now underwater. Since the storm struck, there have been more than a dozen chemical facilities and oil refineries that have reported serious issues, including leaks, spills, and potential explosions. These facilities, along with Superfund sites, are littered throughout my community.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard’s National Response Center, there were more than 30 calls reporting spilled gasoline, crude oil, petroleum, and the release of contaminants from flare stacks in communities affected by Hurricane Harvey on
The RECLAIM Act Means Business for Appalachian Communities Historically Dependent on Coal

By Bill Price

It was a major victory in June when the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources voted to pass the RECLAIM Act with language that emphasized strong community input. As RECLAIM is written today, it will provide $1 billion to communities historically dependent on coal to help spur long-term economic development projects. The law is sought by the Appalachian region, which communities who have a strong interest in seeing nearby abandoned minelands cleaned up and new economic opportunities created in the process.

You may be asking, “but what do these economic opportunities look like?”

Good question. There are many examples across the country of abandoned mine sites being leveraged to create jobs in agriculture, recreational tourism, retail, and clean energy production.

Agriculture

In Dickenson County, VA, Tammy Owens operates a 110 acre farm that was stripped in the 1970s and 1980s. She uses organic farming practices to grow medicinal plants like goldenseal and cohosh. These organic practices also help to heal the soil and make it fertile again. Meanwhile, in Mingo County, West Virginia, a High Priority abandoned mine site will be reclaimed giving way to the construction of a aquaponics facility on site that will sustainably produce fish and vegetables. This project is funded by the AML Pilot Program and will create up to 12 full-time, permanent jobs.

Business Centers

Abandoned surface and underground mines have left a scarred landscape in Luzerne County, PA. After reclamation efforts, however, a business park was constructed on the land. The commerce and trade park employs over 4,500 people and is home to 39 companies, including Lowe’s, FedEx Ground, and Men’s Warehouse. While more industrial parks are not the economic solution for many rural communities, this case study demonstrates that mine sites could be reclaimed for “brick and mortar” project applications like local businesses, job training facilities, and business incubators.

Recreational Tourism

In western Maryland, water purifiers were installed on the North Branch Potomac River, where an abandoned coal mine had been leaking pollution into the river for decades. Water quality soon improved, and today at least 13 commercial angling and whitewater boating outfitters operate on the river. This new tourism supports more than 40 full time jobs and has an economic impact of nearly $3 million on the area.

Clean Energy

In Glenrock, WY, a massive surface coal mine was converted into a 158-turbine wind farm. This farm produces 237 Megawatts (MW) of electricity, enough to power 66,800 households.

Projects like these are just the beginning. An Eastern Kentucky coal mining company announced this year that it plans to build another large-scale solar project in Appalachian - focusing on two mountaintop-removal coal mining sites outside Pikeville, where environmental and feasibility studies are underway for a 50- to 100-megawatt project.

The lessons from these stories are clear: investments in cleaning up abandoned mine lands can be used to successfully revitalize areas and create jobs. Abandoned mine lands can be transformed into engines of economic opportunity, creating stronger communities, and ecosystems at the same time. This is why Sierra Club and our national and local allies have been pushing Congress to pass the RECLAIM Act - which does just that -as soon as possible. With $1 billion geared toward projects like these, hundreds of communities historically dependent on the coal industry can get a breath of new life.

Ethanol’s Contribution to a Record-Breaking Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico

By Vrinda Manglik

In August, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration observed the largest “dead zone” in the Gulf of Mexico since records began in 1985. At 8,776 square miles, the dead zone is the second largest in the world and approximately the size of New Jersey.

Dead zones, also known as hypoxic zones, are areas in the ocean where algal blooms caused by pollution lead to low oxygen concentrations – causing marine life to suffocate and die. The algal blooms prevent sunlight and oxygen from reaching below the water’s surface, and are fatal to most aquatic life, including plants, fish, marine mammals, and shorebirds.

Contributors leading to these inhospitable conditions include excessive nutrient pollution, which often comes from nitrogen-based fertilizer runoff used in agricultural production. In particular, corn production is notorious for its significant contribution to the dead zone. Unlike other crops, corn cannot grow without fertilizer and thus has high volumes of nitrogen fertilizer runoff associated with its production. Not surprisingly, we have been warned for years that increased production of corn-based ethanol would lead to a larger dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

Corn production in the U.S. was at an all-time high in 2016, with domestic production reaching 15,148,038 bushels. The top corn-producing states in 2016 were Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wisconsin, Texas, Ohio, North Dakota, Missouri, Kansas, Indiana, and Kentucky. All of these states are located within the Mississippi watershed. This means that nitrogen fertilizer runoff in these states flowing into local waterways will drain into the Gulf of Mexico.

It is likely that increased production of corn, including corn for ethanol, has been a major factor in this year’s enormous dead zone. Of the total 2016 U.S. corn production, 36.5 percent (or 5,325 million bushels) was used for ethanol fuel and ethanol distillers dried grains (DDGS). In addition, production of corn-based fuel ethanol has increased in the US since the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) was created in 2005. Although the goal of the RFS, which mandates increased volumes of renewable fuels, was to replace carbon intensive petroleum-based transportation fuels with lower emission renewable fuels to address climate change, it has not achieved its climate change impact reduction goals and has had vast unintended adverse environmental impacts.

Biomass-based diesel is one component that is not actually sustainable. In addition to the impact that corn production has on the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico, producing corn for ethanol also has other adverse environmental impacts. Ethanol production is causing land conversion from other uses such as native grasslands and forests to cropland for corn production, leading to habitat and biodiversity loss. This includes loss of habitat for pollinators such as bees. In addition, a pesticide used in ethanol production, atrazine, is a suspected endocrine disruptor. The EPA has violated its legal duty to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service on the impacts to federally protected species in connection with the agency’s annual setting of renewable fuel volumes. For this reason, the Sierra Club has filed its notice of intent to sue the EPA over these issues.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has the capacity to address its violations. It also has the authority to reduce the mandated ethanol blend. Reducing the production of corn-based ethanol can restore habitats, protect biodiversity, and lessen the size of the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.
The Tennes-Sierran
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Sandy Kurtz
Bill Moll, Chair, TN Chapter Political Committee
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LOOKING AHEAD: Conservation Lobby Day 2018
The Tennes-Sierran Club Chapter will be coordinating the Conservation Educa-
Day at the state capitol in February 2018. This is an annual event, held in
cooperation with the Tennessee Environmental Council and the Tennessee Conser-
vation Voters. Because of the heightened threats to the environment, the Sierra Club will
be leading an enhanced education effort.
The goal is to have a meeting with every Representative and Senator to ask for sup-
port of key environmental initiatives before the Legislature (last year, we met with just eight). We are currently working with our
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Tuesday alone.
Perhaps the most terrifying thing at the moment is that we simply don’t know what’s happening at these facilities. The monitors have been shut down, workers,
understandably, have fled the toxic sites, and the only way we can really know what’s
happening is when we see it or smell it. Petrochemical companies are expected to
report emissions of pollutants to nearby communities like mine, which are largely
report minor and low-income. This temporary self-reporting could leave us uninformed
about potentially dangerous pollutants in their air.
There’s a reason these facilities are located so close to my home, to the schools
that caused the release of about 10 million pounds of pollutants into the atmosphere. The judge ruled that Exxon violated the
Clean Air Act 16,386 times between October
Superstorms like Harvey only heighten the
As the clouds clear and the sun returns, and we begin to think about rebuilding, we
must ensure that the recovery is just and equitable, and ensures communities are
not displaced nor threatened by these toxic sites ever again, no matter the weather.
the environment) need you. We
prepared to be a leader in your area. We
(and the environment) need you. Bill Moll,
Coord. Conservation Lobby Day 2018
Chair, TN Chapter Political Committee
WHMoll@aol.com
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