Friends of Blackwater

Working to protect West Virginia’s High Alleghenies, Blackwater River & Blackwater Canyon.

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photo by: John Canan
Friends of Blackwater Comments on Major Projects

Serious Flaws on the Monongahela National Forest’s Greenbrier Southeast Timber Project

The Monongahela National Forest has proposed to conduct large-scale commercial logging on 5,594 acres in Pocahontas County in West Virginia. They also propose to apply herbicides to 2,025 acres, burn 1,904 acres, build 8.7 miles of roads and 49.1 acres of skid roads, install 34 log landings, and turn 125 acres into open fields.

Friends of Blackwater and the Center for Biological Diversity believe that this proposal is much too broad, and that it would have a negative impact on wildlife and forest users.

On June 10th, 2020, beginning at 1:00pm, the West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection Division of Mining and Reclamation will host an online, informal conference regarding a proposed surface mining and reclamation permit on Corridor H North of Davis, WV.

Thank you to the 356 people who requested a hearing about this surface mine. We will send e-mail notices about how to join the meeting online to everyone who commented.

Geologists, engineers, specialists and inspections and enforcement personnel will answer questions to the best of their ability, followed by a comment period where questions will not be answered.

Meanwhile, FOB met with representatives of Keystone Coal Reserve on March 15, 2020 to review their mining and reclamation plan for the site, located on Corridor H across from Martins Cove, 5 miles north of Davis and across the highway from Beaver Creek.

We pored over maps, learned about the history of the site and asked questions about potential pollution sources. Former DEP inspector Brad Moore, who has years of experience with this site, helped represent FOB’s interests.

Our site tour revealed the awful state that Beacon Resources left after they finished mining coal and rock in 2013. We were standing on a wasteland, overlooking a huge pit and river that is visible from the Corridor. The company plans to fill in the pit as part of the reclamation process.

The overburden at this mine site, which is the rock above the coal seam, is such that iron, aluminum, and other heavy metals don’t pollute the groundwater. This is different from most abandoned mine lands in this region and gives us hope that, if done properly and according to DEP standards, this area could be abandoned mine lands in this region and gives us hope that, if done properly and according to DEP standards, this area could be

If the re-mining and reclamation is to be successful, detailed plans and maps of where water from the permit area will go must be created. This includes the setup of treatment ponds and culverts under Corridor H, that will ensure that water from the mine site will not hurt water quality in Beaver Creek.

Keep an eye out for notice of the June 10 online public hearing, and thanks for helping to protect Beaver Creek!

On the Cover: John Canan

John Canan is a conservation photographer and writer, whose work focuses on the Rewilding of the human imagination and our sense of place. His work featuring South America has been exhibited by The National Geographic Museum. Thank you, John for the beautiful cover photograph!

You can see John’s work at the following links:
Website: http://FOB.mountainsandrivers.co
Instagram: www.instagram.com/mountainsandriverphoto
Facebook: www.facebook.com/mountainsandriverphoto

The Smokey Camp Knob fire tower

The Keystone pit, visible from Corridor H

The Smoke Camp Knob fire tower

Both the Eastern hellbender and the green floater mussel, two rare species negatively impacted by sediment are in the proposed area.

The massive Greenbrier Southeast logging project was first approved along the Virginia/West Virginia border—an area that is full of beautiful scenic views, endangered and rare species, and high elevation mountain streams flowing into the Greenbrier River.

“Ginny,” the West Virginia northern flying squirrel lives here, as well as the rare (and federally protected) candy darter fish and the hellbender. The streams in the proposal area are famous for their rich aquatic life, including brook trout—with fishing in Buffalo Fork Lake. Historic sites include the Camp Allegheny Civil War Battlefield, and the Smoke Camp Knob Fire Tower viewing point, at 4,257 feet.

This area also backs up to the Laurel Fork Special Biological Area on the George Washington National Forest. Laurel Fork contains one of the finest examples of northern boreal natural community complexes in Virginia, and is the only representative of the Allegheny Plateau Ecoregion within the Commonwealth. (“Ginny” lives here, too.)

Before the U.S. Forest Service conducts logging operations in a National Forest, they must involve the public—pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Friends of Blackwater and the Center for Biological Diversity have commented to the Service that the proposal information shared with the public is not compliant with the requirements of NEPA. For example, it does not include important information about the project’s potential impacts to the candy darter and other protected species.

The Forest Service’s failure to include this information deprives the public of the opportunity to provide meaningful and informed public comment. It also precludes the Forest Service from taking the necessary “hard look” at the environmental impacts of the proposed project. And finally, it fails to provide a reasonable range of alternatives to provide a clear basis for the choice among options by the decision make and the public.

We are very concerned that the current Administration is ducking its legal requirements that are designed to protect environmental values. We have urged the Forest Service to suspend this proposal until consultation with Fish and Wildlife Service on the candy darter, endangered bat, and the rusty patched bumblebee is completed.

And we have asked that the agency provide an additional comment period, so that the public can meaningfully contribute to the decision-making process.

With your support, we will continue to engage with the Forest Service and take whatever steps are necessary to see that the law is followed. Thanks for caring about our beautiful Allegheny Highlands!
The Horseshoe Run Public Hearing on March 5 in Parsons was a success! More than fifty 50 concerned members of the public showed up at the Tucker County Board of Education Gym. People came from Morgantown, Charles Town, Kingwood, Cheat Lake, and all over Tucker County. 15 people spoke and all opposed the injection well permit.

Landowners who would be affected by a spill spoke about concern over their farmland and reported feeling earthquakes in the area. Fishermen spoke about the robust trout population which would be harmed by a spill into Horseshoe Run or the Cheat River. Conservation groups, including Friends of Blackwater and Friends of the Cheat, listed issue after issue with the permit site, and concerns for watershed health. People who have lived near injection wells spoke about problems they had faced learning about the contents of the waste that was being injected into the earth next to their property and upstream of their homes.

Over 1,750 people have signed a petition demanding this public hearing, and supporting FOB’s concerns about this injection well site; and hundreds of specific comments have been added. Thank you for your active participation in these efforts to protect the Cheat Watershed from fracking pollution!

A new Friends of Blackwater booklet, “Voices of Horseshoe Run,” presents moving citizen testimony about the historic significance, beauty, wildlife, recreation and economic value of Horseshoe Run, a tributary of the Cheat River near the Town of Saint George in Tucker County.

“Voices of Horseshoe Run” was created with the help of concerned members of the Horseshoe Run and St. George community, including photographer John Canan, who shared many of the photos included in the booklet (along with the cover photo of this newsletter). You can see a copy of the booklet at our website, saveblackwater.org.

The West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection is now considering the injection well permit. Watch this space for updates!

Citizens Speak Out to Protect Horseshoe Run from Toxic Waste

"I absolutely do not want an injection well anywhere near our streams."

CAROL CRAVER
LOCAL CITIZEN

"Destroying pristine streams, the aquifer, and the forests of this quiet farming community would be a monumental travesty."

JOSEPH DUMIRE
LOCAL CITIZEN

"This watershed is as near to pristine as almost any in our state."

CLARA HALFIN
LOCAL CITIZEN

"How wonderful to swim in a stream and know that it is safe and not poisoned, to know the wild animals that live there have clear water, I want to see it protected for all of us."

PAULA STAHL
LOCAL CITIZEN

"I’m very concerned about the location of this injection well, being so close to recreational opportunities, which is what is so special here in our area and our home."

DEBBY MCHENRY
LOCAL CITIZEN

"It would be wasteful if the injection site were to, in any way, negatively affect the Upper Cheat Watershed by degrading one of the most treasured and protected tributaries of the river - Horseshoe Run."

FRIENDS OF THE CHEAT
LOCAL ORGANIZATION

"So much time and money has gone into restoring the Cheat River - upwards of 20 million dollars and counting - it would be devastating to undermine that with this project."

FOB
LOCAL ORGANIZATION
Endangered Species Day was May 15th! To celebrate, Friends of Blackwater hosted an Endangered Species Artwork Contest for Kids. We challenged our youngest supporters, aged 2 through 12th grade, to learn about an endangered species -- either native to West Virginia or somewhere else around the world -- and then draw or paint it in its natural habitat, and submit it to FOB.

We had two awesome judges -- West Virginia native watercolorist Rosalie Haizlett, and “Ginny” the WV Northern Flying Squirrel! Rosalie has partnered with FOB in the past to create an Endangered Species of WV watercolor series, and we were thrilled to have her participate in this contest. And “Ginny,” of course, is protected in the Monongahela National Forest, thanks to her thousands of supporters!

Our contestants sent in an incredible array of artwork -- ranging from a collage of the tiny, beautiful Candy Darter fish, to a painting of the fierce and ferocious Eastern Cougar -- to a drawing of a Bald Eagle dunking a basketball! What creativity! Thank you to everyone who participated in this contest -- we had so much fun admiring the art, and such a hard time picking a winner in each category. The winners are: Tiny Conservationist: Nix Mielzarek, age 4, WV Northern Flying Squirrel; Elementary School: Levi Yoder, age 10, Candy Darter; Middle School: Kate Eshenaur, age 14, Guyandotte River Crayfish; High School: Hermione Vos, age 17, Eastern Cougar.

Our winners will receive an endangered sticker pack from Rosalie Haizlett, a FOB t-shirt, a flying squirrel puppet, or a stuffed bat figure. Let’s give a round of applause for all the great entries!
FOB Receives Grant for Blackwater Loop Trail

Friends of Blackwater has received a grant to create a Blackwater Loop hiking and biking trail that will safely and scenically connect the Towns of Thomas and Davis.

Judy Rodd, Friends of Blackwater’s Director, said: “We are so proud to have received a pilot grant for $800,000 for Tucker County trail development from the Office of Surface Mining, for economic development on historical minelands. The new Blackwater Canyon Loop Trail from Thomas to Davis joins the old railroad grade and Blackwater Falls State Park trails into one continuous loop.”

“The key link is a pedestrian bridge across the North Fork of the Blackwater, right at Douglas Falls,” Rodd continued. “This bridge will be a super outdoor recreation experience and photo destination.”

Rodd continued, “The trail will be eight miles long, with kiosks and interpretive signs along the way, explaining industrial and railroad history, as well as the unique ecology of the area. Trailheads will be developed in the towns of Thomas and Davis. Parking areas will be added for those who want to only do part of the trail. The trail will be family-friendly and open to hikers and bikers. Maps of the trail and tourism promotion are part of the grant.”

The trail will create a unique outdoor experience that will build the local tourism economy and provide healthy outdoor recreation for all. Features along the route include two old railroad bridges, historic coke ovens, and the site of the railroad roundhouse. The Loop Trail also includes a spectacular view of Blackwater Canyon from Pase Point, the deep woods of the Dobbins House trail in the state park, Pendleton Lake, and Blackwater Falls. The Loop Trail will run along the main stem of the Blackwater River, with its famous fishing spots, and have its terminus in Davis City Park, where historic signs will explain the town’s industrial past. “This fabulous trail will have good food and drink at either end, as well places to stay overnight. See you on the Loop Trail!” Rodd said.

Letters of support for the Blackwater Loop Trail

LOCAL BUSINESSES
- Highlands Artisan’s Gallery
- Big Belly Deli
- Bloom
- Bright Morning Inn
- Canaan Realty
- Sinterini’s - Canaan and Davis
- Christmas Shoppe
- Diana Vera
- Driftwood Ski and Sport
- East West Printing
- Flying Pigs
- Highland Market
- Margaret Brown
- Mountain Top Realty
- The Purple Fiddle
- Ski Barn
- The Billy Motel
- Three Castle Antiques
- Ursus Americanus
- Whitecorum Art Gallery
- Wild Ginger and Spice

FEDERAL
- Monongahela National Forest, Shawn Cochran
- U.S. Senate, Joe Manchin
- U.S. Senate, Shelley Moore Capito
- U.S. House of Representatives, David McKinley

STATE
- Blackwater Falls State Park, Matt Baker

COUNTY
- Mountain Top Library
- City of Thomas, Matt Quattro
- City of Davis, Joe Drenning
- Tucker County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Jessica Waldo
- Mountain Top Library, Ivonne Martinez
- Tucker County Cultural District Authority, Rob Burns
- Tucker County Historic Landmarks Commission, Savannah Wilkins

NON-PROFITS
- The Aurora Project, Viola Wentzel
- Blackwater Bike Club, Sue Haywood
- Heart of the Highlands, Cory Chase
- Tucker County Historic Society, Rose Davis
- Tucker Community Foundation
- West Virginia Rails-to-Trails Council, Sallie Bell
- West Virginia Scenic Trail Association, Diana Anestis

INDIVIDUALS
- Peter Butler WVU School of Landscape Architecture
- Doug Aarbergst: WVU Extension Rural Tourism
- Dr. Brandi Grawertner: Professor Alderson Broaddus College
- Margaret Brown
- Diana Vera
Active Water Treatment at the Muddy Creek Mine Drainage Treatment Project

June 2020

Friends of Blackwater has some exciting news! Starting this summer, we will begin the process of working with engineers to design and construct a passive treatment system in the Beaver Creek watershed to treat Seep 100-2. For the past four years, FOB has been conducting water monitoring, testing dissolved metals, cleaning up litter in the watershed, supporting the restoration work of other organizations around Beaver Creek, and promoting the area as a great recreational site.

Last year, we completed and submitted the Beaver Creek Watershed Watershed Based Plan to the EPA. This laid out the coal mining history, environmental issues, and proposed restoration projects for the Beaver Creek Watershed. The EPA approved our plans and application for the first restoration project.

This particular seep receives acidity from mine spoils that litter the watershed, left there by mining operations from over 50 years ago. The water that we will be treating as an average pH of 2.9 - the same pH as lemon juice! Thousands of pounds of dissolved heavy metals will be removed before they enter Beaver Creek with the passive treatment system that will be constructed next year.

If you’d like to learn more about this project, including how to volunteer during water monitoring days, contact Emmie Cornwell, our watershed project director, at emmie@saveblackwater.org. More information about the Beaver Creek Watershed and how FOB plans to restore the creek can be found on our website at saveblackwater.org/water/.

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In this two-page newsletter, we reported that the North Fork has been chosen for a mine drainage "active treatment" facility site by the West Virginia DEP's Division of Land Restoration. This is very good news!

If you walk down the Blackwater Rail Trail from our office (past the cake ovens), you come to Douglas Falls – and while the blue and orange rocks in the stream may look void, the water is very much polluted by acid mine drainage. The blue comes from aluminum, and the orange comes from iron -- dissolved underground in nearby deep mines, and entering the North Fork through mine portals and seeps.

Friends of Blackwater previously received grants to reconstruct a passive treatment system, to treat a portion of the mine drainage entering the North Fork. Now we are diverting these funds to support the design and engineering of the active treatment system.

These meetings serve to update each other on ongoing or upcoming projects, raise awareness about issues in the Beaver Creek Watershed, and create multi-agency partnerships. We all have the same goal: to improve Beaver Creek by restoring water quality, improving terrestrial ecology, and promoting sustainable recreation.

From this particular meeting, a new potential collaboration began between the DOH and the DEP Office of Abandoned Mine Lands to work on a recently unstabilized bridge on Remington Road, a primary access point to Beaver Creek. Friends of Blackwater reported on the recent Keystone activity and our plan to begin the restoration of Seep 100-2, removing thousands of pounds of heavy metals from the creek. Downstream Strategies updated us on their in-stream restoration projects that will help create habitat for the brown trout that will return to the creek with the passive treatment system. The Oldbean brothers reported on the success of their new "brownie" fish and the latest work on Seep 100-2.

Friends of Blackwater has been working for twenty years to protect the Blackwater Canyon region, and in every one of those years we have seen a vibrant recreational economy grow. We are happy that progress is being made to create the infrastructure to keep that growth strong. Thanks, Cheryl!
Tom Kunz, a great friend of West Virginia’s bats, dies at 81

From 2007 to 2011, Thomas Henry Kunz, distinguished biologist and Boston University Professor, wrote a series of scientific articles about how poorly-sited industrial wind turbines threaten bat species in West Virginia. Dr. Kunz concluded that up to 10,000 bats a year could be killed at each industrial wind turbine site.

Sadly, on April 15, 2020, Dr. Kunz passed away at the age of 81, due to complications of COVID-19. We will miss this wonderful scientist, who is survived by his loving wife, Margaret Kunz.

Tom Kunz joined the faculty in the Department of Biology at Boston University in 1971, where he was fondly known as “Batman.” His “Ecological and Behavioral Methods for the Study of Bats” is a leading resource for researchers, educators and conservationists. In 2005, the University of Central Missouri presented him with their Distinguished Alumni Award, calling him “one of the world’s leading mammalogists.”

Friends of Blackwater has been blessed to have the assistance of a world-class scientist like Dr. Kunz as we advocate for the special wildlife of the Allegheny Highlands. We won’t give up the fight! Our love goes out to his family and colleagues.
Land and Water Fund Has Great Value, Gets Manchin Support

Senators Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) are backing new bipartisan legislation that will spur critical investments in our National Park and public recreational lands.

Their new proposal combines two bills, The Land & Water Conservation Fund (“LWCF”) Permanent Funding Act will require the President to submit specific details of funds to be allocated to the LWCF annually to Congress. The Restore our Parks Act requires revenue to be deposited into the National Park Service Legacy Restoration Fund and used for deferred maintenance needs of the National Park Service.

Originally created in 1964, the Land & Water Conservation Fund is a bipartisan effort to protect natural areas across the United States. The fund made it possible to set aside large landscapes like the Grand Canyon, and smaller slices of heaven like Blackwater Falls State Park, without spending taxpayer dollars. Every year, $900 million paid by energy companies who drill offshore is put into the Fund. Unfortunately, Congress has often been able to divert these funds away from outdoor recreational lands.

The new proposal “is the once-in-a-generation chance we have been waiting for to solidify our investments in the outdoor economy and put an end to the constant raiding of LWCF,” Tom Cors, spokesman for the LWCF Coalition said.

Senator Manchin has been an advocate for the LCWF for many years. In 2018, Manchin spoke in favor of permanently reauthorizing the LCWF after it was allowed to expire in 2019. He stated that since 1964, the LWCF has given West Virginia $241 million to protect natural areas. “LWCF funds have made West Virginia even more Wild and Wonderful, for all of us to enjoy and escape the daily hustle and bustle of our everyday lives.” In West Virginia there are eleven currently planned LWCF projects, and we hope to see more Wild and Wonderful, for all of us to enjoy and escape the daily hustle and bustle of our everyday lives.” In West Virginia there are eleven currently planned LWCF projects, and we hope to see more Wild and Wonderful, for all of us to enjoy and escape the daily hustle and bustle of our everyday lives.

Our enthusiastic crew completed a lot of turnpiking and drainage work, but they were unable to complete the project.

Now, we'll be working with the Appalachian Conservation Corps' 6-person crew of AmeriCorps volunteers for 8 weeks this summer, to finish the work and when these brave youth are done, there will be no more mucking through 6 inches of mud!

The Canyon Rim and Limerock Trails are on the Monongahela National Forest. They take hikers through hemlock forests, mountain laurel groves, past rocky outcroppings looking out over the Canyon, and over a beautiful creek. We'll have a volunteer day earlier in the summer to prepare for the Americorps workers. Stay tuned for the dates! And thanks to the FOB donors and funding from the West Virginia Division of Transportation who make this work possible!

Happy 100th Birthday to the Monongahela National Forest ("the Mon")

We appreciate being able to partner with "the Mon" National Forest on a wide range of projects, including restoration and trail work. We look forward to a long and fruitful partnership to improve recreation, water quality, and unique habitats in the Allegheny Highlands.

The Mon is BIG -- 921,000 acres. Why is so much land publicly-owned and managed by public servants? Because West Virginia's Highlands forests originally had their trees stripped away over several decades, in a massive "timber boom."

"Tumult on the Mountains!" by Roy Clarkson is the definitive book about the timber boom. Spectacular cathedrals of towering hemlocks and oaks were replaced with miles of barren, charred landscapes. Wilderness raged across rocky slopes and soil washed away. Massive floods swept the region.

In 1920, National Forest legislation began to purchase these abandoned, broken landscapes and began to manage them for public purposes. At its creation, the Mon Forest had one ranger, located in Tucker County. During the Great Depression, FDR's New Deal grew the Forest and CCC camps stationed around the newly added parcels created fire towers, roads, trails and cabins. In 1942, the Forest exceeded 800,000 acres. Since then, visitor centers, additional ranger districts, National Recreation Areas, and more have been added.

Friends of Blackwater works collaboratively with the Mon Forest to improve trails, protect endangered, threatened, and sensitive species like the Candy Darter and WV Northern Flying Squirrel, and preserve unique landscapes.
EXCITING NEWS!

We are excited to announce that Friends of Blackwater has been selected by the Office of Surface Mining to create a Blackwater Loop hiking and biking trail that will safely and scenically connect the Towns of Thomas and Davis in Tucker County.

The eight-mile trail will feature an incredible suspension bridge over the North Fork of the Blackwater!

There will also be trailhead kiosks in each town, updated maps, historic signage, food and drink on either end, and a new and improved trail for bikers and pedestrians of all ages traversing between the Monongahela National Forest and Blackwater Falls State Park. The grant is for $818,000, and we hope to raise more to make this the best trail ever! Thanks for all your support, and we will see you on the Blackwater Loop!