Exciting news from Friends of Blackwater, “Living in the Mountains!”

Dear supporter of Friends of Blackwater --

I’m writing to ask you to make a year-end donation -- to help Friends of Blackwater protect the Blackwater Canyon and the Allegheny Highlands.

In 2017, we expanded our heritage tourism and watershed improvement projects. Our Blackwater Canyon Trail Master Plan sparked an enthusiastic response from the local business community -- like the Bright Morning Inn, The Purple Fiddle, Cooper House, TipTop, Trailhead Coffee, Blackwater Bikes, Sirianni’s, and Blackwater Outdoor Adventures.

We are proud that “Ginny,” the rare West Virginia northern flying squirrel, is becoming famous in the scientific world, with research on her diet and habitat featured in the *Journal of Mammalogy* and the *Wildlife Society Bulletin*.

And we are getting out to classrooms across the mountain State with our fun and educational “Kitchen Klimate Science” program, training a new generation of environmental stewards.

These positive programs depend on donations from supporters like you -- so please, give as generously as you can to keep them going!

Meanwhile, new threats to Blackwater and the Allegheny Highlands arise every day. Agencies that protect our public lands are seeing their scientists replaced by political appointees who literally want to roll back every single environmental protection we have worked so hard for.

We have to defeat proposed cuts to funding for treatment for mine land reclamation. “Tax reform” is being proposed that would reduce deductions for conservation and land protection!

Friends of Blackwater is leading a campaign to let the WV Congressional delegation know that West Virginians support the Endangered Species Act, which protects species like the Cheat Mountain salamander, “Ginny” the flying squirrel, and the Indiana, northern long-eared, and Virginia big-eared bats -- who all use the Blackwater Canyon for food and shelter.

To build this campaign, we are doing more outreach on Facebook, creating a new website to better communicate with you, and have new staffers in our Thomas office taking on these important issues.

Big challenges take big commitments. We hope that you will support Friends of Blackwater’s work with a generous year-end gift, and help in the fight for the Canyon and Highlands that we love.

From the staff, thanks for all you have done. Please continue your support!

“Ginny”  Judy  Ian  Kate
John Bright

The Purple Fiddle has been a beloved Thomas institution for fifteen years. Owner John Bright opened the popular music venue, bar, and eatery in 2002, and says its location near the Blackwater Canyon has been an important part of its success.

“I think a lot of the laid back vibe of Thomas is because your view is of the river and the trail. Even in the middle of downtown you’re so close to these natural areas- you feel like you can breathe.”

Although he initially came to the Thomas area just looking for a safe, quiet community to start a business in, Bright now says that it’s hard to picture the Purple Fiddle anywhere else. “It’s possible that we could add locations”, he says, “but I don’t think we could ever let go of this spot.”

The Purple Fiddle is part of the Thomas Historic District and history is another part of the appeal, with the sign for DePollo’s General Store, once housed in the same building, still hanging on the wall.

Bright says he would love to see historic tours in the canyon, highlighting the structures left by the railroad industry and the Davis Coal and Coke Company. A runner and mountain biker himself, he has been a trail enthusiast and supporter of Friends of Blackwater for years.

Laura Goff Davis

Laura Goff Davis, a stalwart Friends of Blackwater supporter, comes from an old Clarksburg, WV family. Laura’s great-grandfather was Nathan Goff, who served as a major in the Union Army in the Civil War, and went on to a distinguished career in public service as a federal judge, US Senator from West Virginia, and US Secretary of the Navy.

Throughout her life, Laura has followed in her ancestor’s footsteps, working for a just and civil society. She is active in historic preservation with the Harrison County Historical Society. Her Oakmound Farm is home to a Hopewellian native culture “Indian Mound,” which she plans to protect with a conservation easement. Laura’s daughter Diana is a physician in the Pittsburgh area, and her son Payton Fireman is a lawyer in Morgantown.

Laura began supporting the campaign to protect the Blackwater Canyon 16 years ago -- signing petitions, sending comment letters, and donating to keep our staff hard at work! She is especially fond of “Ginny” the West Virginia flying squirrel, and wants Ginny’s Canyon home protected. Friends of Blackwater is proud to be working for Laura and so many other people who cherish the Highlands!
Program Updates

Signage Helps Grow Heritage Tourism

By June 2018 Friends of Blackwater will install four new interpretive signs along the Blackwater Canyon Rail-Trail. The signs use historic photos and text to explain the bustling industries that once lined the Trail. In November 2017 we organized a planning tour with consultant David Vago and Forest Service archaeologist Gavin Hale. Our volunteers and staff also conducted several fun clean-ups — to make historic structures like coke ovens more visible; this will continue next year.

Beaver Creek Collaboration

This fall, Friends of Blackwater organized a coalition of government agencies and local non-profits to create a strategy for improving Beaver Creek. Representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Highways, and the Canaan Valley Institute all weighed in on how to make Beaver Creek into a recreation destination. We are excited to see this collaboration take off.

Endangered Species Act

Friends of Blackwater members have gone “above and beyond” the call of duty to support the Endangered Species Act! We asked you to speak up for this vital environmental law, and nearly 300 concerned citizens delivered. We have taken your letters to Senators Manchin and Capito, and hope that they will do the right thing by protecting our unique landscapes and species. Keep the letters coming!

Squirrel Science

“Ginny,” the West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel, was featured in two scientific journals this year. A study in the Journal of Mammalogy confirmed Ginny’s preference for old-growth forest; this finding will be useful for resisting logging or other disruptive projects in squirrel habitat. More recently, the Wildlife Society Bulletin devoted an article to the innovative methodology used by researchers Stephanie Trapp and Elizabeth Flaherty to study flying squirrels. All this research was made possible by Friends of Blackwater members!

Cleaning up the North Fork

Our North Fork Watershed Project recently took a big step forward, signing a contact with BioMost, Inc. to design an acid mine drainage remediation system. Monitoring shows that the lower part of the North Fork is too acidic and high in dissolved metals to support healthy aquatic life. The next phase of the process is the analysis of various methods for raising the pH and reducing metals. By next spring we will have a design and be ready to work on implementation!

Climate Change

Friends of Blackwater’s “Kitchen Klimate Science” program uses molecule models, music, and hands-on activity to engage students with atmospheric science. We’ve done this program in more than twenty classrooms around the region. In November, we took the program to the West Virginia Science Teachers Association, to help educators incorporate climate science into their curricula. With more programs scheduled, the 2017-18 school year will be another exciting year for climate education!

Woodland Trails

Our trail improvement programs on the ground are paying off! Canyon Rim and Limerock Trails in the Blackwater Canyon are getting much-needed upgrades, with new treadwork and turnpiking, to get hikers and bikers across boggy areas. Thanks to all the volunteers from Experience Learning, WVU, and the Great Allegheny Valley Conservation Council, who put in 750 hours of trail work! And thanks to all of the FOB donors who support this work!

Blackwater Canyon

New documents filed with Fish and Wildlife Service show that Allegheny Wood Products plans to log and build on its holdings in the Blackwater Canyon. The area in question is a beautiful part of the viewshed of the Canyon, and home to rare and sensitive species. Friends of Blackwater will fight to ensure that responsible steps are taken to protect the Canyon’s unique ecology.
Season's Greetings!

Friends of Blackwater

SAVE the DATE
WINTER FILM FESTIVAL
February 8th
@ Whitegrass Ski Center

Season's Greetings!

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