Dear Friends:

Just as I sat down to compose this letter, I got a call from the Blackwater Canyon’s most famous inhabitant, “Ginny” the West Virginia Northern flying squirrel. Ginny had just read an article by Glenn Smith, who works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Massachusetts. In the article, Glenn says that we should “celebrate – not litigate" the fact that FWS is taking every shred of legal protection away from Ginny and her family. “Judy,” said Ginny, “Glenn Smith’s letter is so full of hogwash you can cut it with a knife!”

Ginny was right. Records show plans to de-list began Ginny more than seven years ago, and the entire review process was conducted in secret. Hundreds of FWS documents are still withheld from public scrutiny. FWS’ decision was opposed by independent scientists who have studied Ginny for years. The FWS decision doesn’t even mention the effects of climate change on Ginny’s habitat – just like the Bush Administration approach to the polar bear! Glenn claims that the de-listing was approved by the Government Accounting Office. That’s false: the GAO report said that FWS failed to make such a determination. If the agency decides the answer is “no,” independent experts at FWS and NMFS would have the opportunity to review the decision. While the action agency would theoretically still be responsible if harm occurs, it would take a citizen lawsuit against the agency to halt or alter the destructive activity. Citizens and courts would be forced to provide the independent checks and balances now provided by FWS and NMFS experts.

I picked up the phone and called Ginny. “What do you think, Judy?” she chirped. “Should I go to the hearing?” I asked. “Nope,” she said. “I won’t go if I were you. Without endangered species protection, Glenn could run you over with his SUV and laugh about it. I have a better idea. Our lawyers have a notice of intent to sue just about ready, and they can give it to Glenn at the party.”

“Good idea,” said Ginny. “Let’s celebrate our determination to keep the endangered species laws strong – and litigate!” We hung up, and I finished writing this letter. We appreciate your support for legal protection away from Ginny and her family.

Sincerely,

Judy Rodd, Director

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has protected wildlife at risk of extinction. Because of this landmark law, bald eagles, grizzly bears and peregrine falcons and many others are all thriving. But the Bush administration has proposed an 11th-hour rule change that would make it harder for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to protect endangered species and their habitat.

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires federal agencies to consult with FWS and NMFS to ensure that their actions do not jeopardize a listed plant or animal, or harm or destroy its habitat. These independent reviews, called Section 7 consultations, provide a critical safety net for imperiled wildlife. After years of failed attempts to roll back endangered species protections in Congress, industry lobbyists have convinced the Bush administration to propose weakening the ESA themselves through a regulatory change.

Removes Crucial Safeguard for Imperiled Wildlife and Habitat

The Bush proposal would allow federal agencies to decide on their own if they think their actions would negatively impact a threatened or endangered species. Many of these agencies do not even have biologists or other qualified staff to make such a determination. If the agency decides the answer is “no,” independent experts at FWS and NMFS would have the opportunity to review the decision. While the action agency would theoretically still be responsible if harm occurs, it would take a citizen lawsuit against the agency to halt or alter the destructive activity. Citizens and courts would be forced to provide the independent checks and balances now provided by FWS and NMFS experts.

Additionally, even when an agency requests consultation, it would not be required to follow the Independent Scientific Consultants’ (ISCs) recommendations. On average, more than 95 percent are rejected through informal consultation. Independent scientific consultants make such a determination. If the agency decides the answer is “no,” independent experts at FWS and NMFS would have the opportunity to review the decision. While the action agency would theoretically still be responsible if harm occurs, it would take a citizen lawsuit against the agency to halt or alter the destructive activity. Citizens and courts would be forced to provide the independent checks and balances now provided by FWS and NMFS experts.

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On September 25, 2008, Bush administration extremists at the U. S. Department of the Interior disregarded the opinion of top wildlife scientists and striped “Ginny,” the West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel, of all federal endangered species protection. Under federal law, it is now “open season” on this tiny nocturnal mammal, which lives in only eight high Appalachian mountain counties.

So, what difference does this make? The answer is— an incredible difference! Days after the decision, a gas lease in prime flying squirrel habitat near Roaring Plains in the Monongahela National Forest was put up for sale. In Blackwater Canyon, a timber company asked the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove large areas of land from their proposed Habitat Conservation Plan— because what happens to Ginny, and her nest, and her babies — is no longer a legal concern!

Friends of Blackwater will soon be fitting a lawsuit seeking to overturn the Fish and Wildlife decision. Lawyers from the Center for Biological Diversity will lead the charge, making this the Center’s first endangered species litigation on the East Coast. This group has been successful in reversing the cutting of the old in Michigan and the Rocky Mountains, and very recently got the government to reverse their decision on polar bear protection! We know they can do it for Ginny.

These new threats to Ginny and her family make it all the more important to move forward on the full public ownership of the Blackwater Canyon, where 3,000 wild and scenic acres remain in private ownership, and where Ginny’s very survival is at grave risk.

Here’s how you can help save Ginny’s home in the Blackwater Canyon today—

Phone, write, or fax the offices of United States Senator Robert C. Byrd, WV, and ask him to help move forward the Blackwater Canyon land purchase.
Senator Byrd’s phone numbers are 202-224-3954, or 304-342-5855.

Please act today to protect Ginny and her mountain home!
The new bridge over Tank Run in Blackwater Falls State park is finally completed and makes it easier to walk or bike from Davis City Park, across the new bridge, and then along the River Trail and be at Blackwater Falls after an easy 20 minute walk. Friends of Blackwater, Tucker County Trail group, and the staff of the state park partnered to build the bridge. Friends of Blackwater proposes calling this new entrance to the State Park the LEATHER BARK GRADE, in remembrance of the sawmill and tannery located along the river here.

On Sunday, September 27th, volunteers celebrating National Public Lands Day planted trees along the River Trail at the new bridge and along the new entrance to the park at the Davis Bridge along Route 32. Tree planting was chosen as the theme this year to honor the 75th anniversary of the Civilian Conservation Corps program that put young people to work planting trees on public land during the Great Depression. Many trees were planted by the CCC at that time in the Monongahela National Forest on Plantation Trail which borders BFSP. Eighteen volunteers made this work possible. Thanks to Pete Johnson, Keith Strausbaugh, Beverly Frame, Tucker Welch, Jana Pyle, Christine Kozan, Andrew and Vaia Meador with their children Sky and Destiny, Jennifer Channel from Barbour County and her sons, Tyler and Logan. And thanks to Dave Saville for supplying the beautiful red spruce that were planted on Sunday.

The FOB North Fork Watershed Project is researching water pollution in the North Branch of the Potomac River from the headwaters at the Fairfax Stone to Gormania. Under a grant from the Marpat Foundation we are looking at impacts from acid mine drainage (AMD) on the West Virginia and Maryland sides. The North Fork of the Blackwater and the North Branch of the Potomac are joined underground by old mining tunnels. The tunnels are filled with polluted water that moves across watersheds and state lines below the surface of the earth. This pollution ends up in the North Branch. We expect to publish a report on this work at the end of 2008.

Below are pictures of this beautiful headwater section of our National River. The pictures were taken by volunteer Jillian Friend in Potomac State Forest along Lostland Run and Laurel Run in Garrett County Maryland traveling with her dog, Sadie. They show one water treatment system, called a limestone “doser” which improves water quality in the Potomac. Thank you, Jillian!!
Fish and Wildlife says Wind Turbines Damaging, Wants NedPower Studies

On August 7, 2008, the West Virginia Field Office of the US Fish and Wildlife Service released a letter that raises questions about whether the NedPower industrial wind turbine project has complied with a Public Service Commission Order licensing the project, which is located next to Dolly Sods.

The letter points out that important bird and bat studies on the Allegheny Front have never been done. The letter contracts statements made by the company in their PSC compliance filings claiming that the Fish and Wildlife Service had agreed with NedPower’s conclusions of “no risk,” and had agreed that the company had complied with all required studies. In the letter, Fish and Wildlife says that the Allegheny Front, where the project is located, is a major migratory corridor for birds and bats; and that the agency knows that many more birds and bats than previously noted have been found at the site. The Service states that better studies are needed because of limitations of past baseline studies, and that additional post-construction studies must be aimed at reducing mortality. The agency wants studies to analyze under what weather conditions and at what time of year, and at what locations, the most bird and bat kills occur. The agency also wants to review the raptor studies redone, and additional mist netting for bats along the newly created turbine corridors.

Fish and Wildlife wants the studies to lead to changes in the project aimed at reducing mortalities. The Service suggests that feathering blades of shutting down turbines have proved to be effective in reducing bird and bat deaths. The letter states: “WVFO (West Virginia Field Office) continues to believe that the (NedPower) Mt Storm wind project poses a greater risk to wildlife than was recognized by pre-construction studies and risk assessments.”

The Service predicts that the NedPower project will kill 215,259 to 308,250 bats during its operation. Citizens will soon go before the PSC to point out the possible fraud perpetrated by NedPower on the PSC in their compliance documents. They will request that the PSC enforce the requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Service Commission Order licensing the project, which is located next to Dolly Sods.

Yellowtop Blooming by J. Lawrence Smith

Weeks before various shades of yellow appear on trees in the fall, roadside and fields will be bright with blooming goldenrod. Many persons consider the plant a weed causing those allergic to pollen much discomfort which isn’t really quite true. Goldenrod, often called yellowtop, actually has benefits not the least of which is as an indicator of weather patterns.

Most persons assume there is only one species of goldenrod, but in West Virginia nearly thirty distinct varieties have been recorded. One of the most familiar is early goldenrod named for blooming as early as late May, but continuing to bloom well into November.

A number are specialized in their requirements and, while ranging over a large area, are found in certain habitat. The showy goldenrod grows, only in central Appalachian mountain areas of the southern and eastern counties. Rand’s goldenrod has been found in the state only in Lewis and Nicholas Counties. While found more widely to the north, the West Virginia locations seem to mark the southern limit of the range of the species.

Bog goldenrod is found in Canaan Valley and many damp places in the mountains where in blooms in August. At least three others, the hispid, downy and mountain species are found mostly in the mountains or eastern areas around the higher Alleghenies.

Goldenrod blooms at the same time as ragweed, a key cause of “hay fever,” and is often blamed for allergic reactions. In reality, the pollen of goldenrod is too heavy to be blown any distance and flying insects are necessary for pollen transfer between plants.

The food in the goldenrod gall fly feed on the plant and formation ofavarrot-like structure on the plant. Parasitic wasps seek out the galls and inject their eggs through a tube on their abdomen called an ovipositor. Upon hatching, the wasp larva devours the gall fly larva.

Goldenrod has long been known to have curative properties and, interestingly, the generic name Solidago means “to make whole.” It has been used to treat inflammation of the bladder, kidney, and prostate, and herbal medicine is especially popular in the treatment of affections of the kidneys.

An infusion stimulates kidney function as well as reducing inflammation.

Inventive Thomas Edison undertook a series of experiments with goldenrod and produced rubber. The tires on his Model T Ford were made from goldenrod rubber. Even though of good quality and durable, no interest was taken in the imitation rubber either by manufacturers or the government.

Late summer seems a time when the land is napping and there are few sounds other than the whine of insects in the fields. The gold yellowtop by the roadside is a sign that fall will soon splash the hues with rainbow hues.

Nature’s Water Conservationist by J. Lawrence Smith

An unsung hero, a least figuratively, in the westward expansion of America was the beaver with the mammal eagerly sought for its lustrous fur.

The beaver trade is most often associated with John Jacob Astor, Jedediah Smith, and mountain men of the Rockies. Even before the exploration of the West, the trade in beaver hides played a vital role in the economy of colonial America.

During the Seventeenth Century, King Charles I deemed the use of beaver fur in the making of hats compulsory in England. Traders in the colonies could readily supply the demand due to the abundance of beavers almost everywhere. Letart, Mason County, was named for James LeTort who carried on a trade in this area on the Ohio River with both Indians and white traders in the mid-1700s.

Daniel Boone operated a trading post and store at Point Pleasant shortly before 1760. He later moved up the Kanawha to settle above Charleston where he lived for a few years. Here he met and taught Paddy Huddleston the skill of trapping beavers at Long Shoal near Kanawha Falls, Fayette County.

The beaver disappeared as America moved westward and it was thought extinct in West Virginia before 1900. They began appearing at a few places in the state early in the last century. About 1930 a colony was established on North River in Hampshire County, but unfortunately never in a few number.

During the 1930s, the Conservation Commission began a program of restocking beavers in the state. As a result of the Dust Bowl and widespread drought during this time, much effort on the federal and state level was given to water conservation. The beaver is skilled at water management and would be of great assistance by doing what came naturally.

Animals brought from Michigan and Wisconsin were released in Randolph, Pocahontas and Webster Counties in 1933 as a first step in bringing the beaver back to West Virginia. In a little more than a decade the number had increased to more than 2000 in a dozen mountain counties. They began to thrive in Canaan Valley where their dams and associated ponds now dot the landscape.

Beavers are key players in the ecology of wetlands with their ponds providing living space for a host of amphibians, fishes, birds and mammals. Here the aquatic stage of the red-spotted newt will be found in abundance dripping in still water. Mallards and black ducks nest while beautiful wood ducks rest and feed on streams in the beaver ponds.

A study in Canaan Valley in 1995 by wildlife personnel revealed nearly 20 percent of free-flowing streams had been impounded or significantly altered by beaver activity. Feelings are mixed about the benefit of their presence with fisherman often insisting warmer water is detrimental to trout production. Regardless of opinion, many lodges in the ponds leave little doubt beavers are right at home and are here to stay.
Robert Markley

This letter is written in regard to your request for information on relatives in the CCC. My father, Bert Farmer, who was born in Eggleston, VA in 1921 and still resides there was a member of the CCC from Sept 1938 to 1940. He enthusiastically recalls many of his work experiences and training during this struggling time for our nation and for the families of so many of the CCC boys, not only aided our country but also offered much needed support for their families.

Upon receiving his paycheck, my father would keep $5 for himself and send $25 home to his mother for her to use for family support. Of the amount his mother received, she used half of it and saved half. My father said he did not save any of his $5. When my father returned from CCC to go to work and to be married before being drafted into WWII, his mother had saved enough for him to purchase a vehicle. He said he drove the vehicle back from the dealership without ever having driven a vehicle before that day.

When in CCC, my father worked mainly on building roads and bridges in Bluefield, Baston, and Hollybark, VA. He also traveled to Tennessee to assist in the fighting of fires. In the flood of 1946, he was able to travel closer to home as he had to assist in cleanup for the flood in Narrows. He remembers being so close to home, but unable to go home and visit with his family.

My father also remembers working hard during the day and taking classes at night. He said he was able to take typing and telephone repair and worked on his high school GED. He remembers having to follow a regimen of rising with the bugs, sulking the flag, and following orders which helped prepare him the WWII upon being drafted.

The CCC provided the military with semi-trained recruits. My father said that what had been picked and shaved a few years earlier became guns and grenades. The boys that had come to the aid of their country through the planting of trees, fighting of fires, and building of bridges and roads, were now equipped for their combat in military combat.

During WWII, my father fought on the front lines and was later captured by the Germans. He was granted release when the Russians captured the POW’s in 1945 near the end of the war. He then returned home. His young adult life was behind him with memories of a struggling family and a struggling nation trying to regain what had been lost. These memories have influenced him and guided him through his long life.

When pondering the life of these young men, it does seem that the trite old saying, “What doesn’t kill you will make you stronger” applies to the generation of the CCC and WWII veterans.

Barbara Mitchell

Elsie George

Elsie Schuyler Lyon Moore George, a scholar who helped shape the American History Advanced Placement exams for high school seniors, died on January 30, 2008 in Springfield, Virginia. She was born on April 28, 1921 in Chicago. A journalism and history major at Northwestern University and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, she met and married Harry Huey Moore, while in North Carolina. She flew with her two children to join her husband, a pilot with CATC Airline in Shanghai, China. Elsie & Harry toured the farthest reaches of China & in some outposts. Elsie was the “first white woman” the natives had ever seen. After her husband’s deployment in World War II history at Kamehameha School on Oahu, Hawaii. After her husband was serving in the US Army, Las Vegas, NV, she instituted new curriculum at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, pioneering such new courses as Women in Literature and Women in Politics. Elsie was one of the first property owners in Timberline, Canaan Valley in WV. She lived for about two and a half years before Alzheimer’s necessitated her move back to Virginia. Elsie was memorialized by her son Kevin George. Kevin provided the above obituary to us for print and noticed also that Elsie continued her love for literature. Elsie lived for over 60 years at Timberline in the 1970s. She moved there upon her retirement from teaching. She taught English for about two and a half years before Alzheimer’s necessitated her move back to Virginia.

Kevin George
When I grew up in the 1940’s and early 1950’s there wasn’t much money so a trip to Blackwater Falls was always a special treat. When friends and relatives came to visit through the years and from many states this was our favorite destination.

It was years later before I discovered Lindy Point and it is still our favorite place to hike. What a fantastic view that actually takes your breath as you come off the trail that first time. One of my older photographs has four generations enjoying a picnic in the park. Now we are privileged to take two more generations to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

When our eleven year old grandson lost his twin brother in 2006 due to an accident we all tried to find things that would interest him to keep him busy. I wasn’t sure what he’d think at his first sight of Lindy Point but when he said “cool” and “awesome” that sounded “cool” to me. Now we are taking our six year old great-grandson and he is quite a trooper on the many steps to the falls.

No matter where we have been fortunate enough to travel to and enjoy this beautiful country it was always so good to come home to my mountains. This is truly “Almost Heaven WV”. I can’t imagine living anywhere else.

Sincerely,

Alvin L. Guyon - Near Keyser, WV

Taking the Canyon Campaign to Congress!!!!

Taking the Canyon Campaign to Congress is part of our ongoing quest to protect the Blackwater Canyon. Please take a minute to fill out the form below and add your personal comments. Then just mail it back to us at: Friends of Blackwater, 501 Elizabeth Street, Charleston, WV 25311 and we will deliver them to WV’s Senator Robert C. Byrd.

Dear Senator Byrd,

Because of your principled stands and your demonstrated wisdom and effectiveness in working for the good of West Virginia and the Nation, we ask for your help today to protect the Blackwater Canyon, West Virginia’s “natural treasure” and Scenic Crown Jewel!

We ask you to please:

• Help secure funding for the public purchase of the 2,700 acres in the heart of the Canyon; and

• Demand that our Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation give the Blackwater Canyon special protection -- for its role as an ark of rare species (including Ginny the WV northern flying squirrel) and historic resources, for its Wild and Scenic River, and for its public hiking/biking Canyon Trail.