

Friends of Blackwater Canyon

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Over Ten Thousand People Tell Forest Service to Protect Blackwater Canyon Trail



Thank you all for your comments!!! In just over two months, concerned citizens have sent thousands of individual comments to the United States Forest Service, opposing a proposal to turn the Blackwater Canyon Trail into a commercial logging road. (Although the formal comment period ended February 3, the Service says that they will still receive comments, which can be sent at www.saveblackwater.org.)

In case you are new to this issue, here's the background in brief: John Crites, owner of the logging company Allegheny Wood Products, has asked the Forest Service to allow Crites to turn the ten-mile-long beautiful Canyon Trail — a premier hiking, biking, and ski trail that is located on public land — into a commercial logging road.

In January 2003, Friends of Blackwater began a “**Keep It Public**” campaign — to tell the Forest Service to protect the Trail, and to perform a full environmental impact statement on the logging road proposal.

The latest count, according to the Forest Service, is that **more than ten thousand people** have sent mail and e-mail on the road proposal. This may be **the largest number of comments ever** in a Monongahela National Forest comment period.

Following are excerpts from some of the comments:

“I've had the pleasure of riding a mountain bike on this trail twice, and it is beautiful beyond description. It has to be God's prototype for Heaven! Please don't allow Mr. Crites to destroy something that can never be repaired or replaced!”

“You are the steward of this forest. Therefore, you carry the burden of our trust. If you do not take the responsibility to stop this latest cut-and-develop frenzy besieging our country, who will? If not now, when?”

“An out-of-state friend once noted that the one picture you could be sure of finding in any West Virginia home was of the Blackwater

Canyon. Please take any necessary steps to ensure this treasure is not lost to future generations.”

“The very serious nature of John Crites' request must be analyzed by a full EIS. Anything less will be an inadequate response on the part of the Forest Service. As a graduate student in Forestry at Virginia Tech, I certainly support the need to harvest timber; however harvesting it from Blackwater Canyon is not appropriate; converting a popular recreation trail into a logging road is not good forest management, in my opinion.”

“My family and friends often bike and hike on this trail. It is special to us and we would like to see it preserved so that we and future generations can enjoy it. The Blackwater Canyon area is a jewel for us to treasure. Please consider to study the negative effects that logging would cause.”

This huge outpouring of public comment will **send a powerful message** to all of our officials and political leaders – not just the Forest Service. Our next step will be to **see how the Forest Service reacts to these comments**. Will the Forest Service do a **full environmental impact statement** on the road proposal, as the law requires when major issues are involved? **Friends of Blackwater will be watching**, and we will report – and react — as soon as there are further developments.

Meanwhile, this Spring would be a great time to hike or bike the beautiful, family-friendly Canyon trail. Call or e-mail us for details. It's a trip you'll never forget!

Finally, let's not forget who made this **public comment avalanche** possible — the “Keep It Public” campaign is supported by the West Virginia Sierra Club, West Virginia Citizen Action Group, West Virginia Environmental Council, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, the West Virginia League of Women Voters, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, West Virginia Highlands

Conservancy, West Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Coalition for Responsible Logging, and Religious Campaign for Forest Preservation, West Virginia Native American Coalition, West Virginia Wildlife Federation, West Virginia Rivers Coalition, West Virginia Whitewater Association, American Rivers, American Lands, the Wilderness Society, with help from the American Hiking Society, West Virginia Rails to Trails Council, and West Virginia Trails Association. Thanks, folks!





Director's Report from Judy Rodd:

Friends of Blackwater – thanks to your continuing support – is a financially viable organization.

*Your donations to our special fund appeal over the holidays totaled \$10,000. Every week we receive checks from supporters of this campaign – from \$5.00 to \$500.00, and even more. (And people donate with their credit cards on our website, too.) Some people send a small donation almost every month — and believe me, **every single bit of support helps.***

Because our grass-roots financial support is strong, non-profit foundations will help our effort. Last summer, the Educational Foundation of America gave us \$45,000; and in January, the wonderful Patagonia Foundation donated \$6,000.

***All of this money is well spent.** It pays our rent at Asbury Church, our phone and computer bills, our printing and postage costs, and the modest salaries of our support staff.*

***Thank you from the bottom of my heart** to all of you who have made donations, written letters, made phone calls, and sent e-mails. **Every success so far** — in the campaign to protect the entire Blackwater Canyon, and move it all into public ownership — **is due to your support**, and your willingness to keep putting the pressure on our public officials.*

***Right now we have a unique financial opportunity** that I want to bring to the attention of every lover of the Blackwater Canyon. A major foundation has **made us an offer that we cannot afford to refuse.** They will match us **dollar for dollar** – up to more than \$30,000, – to pay for a media campaign, to further raise the profile of the Blackwater Canyon.*

I hope you have seen the high-quality TV spots, newspaper ads, and direct mail pieces that we have been producing. With the funding that your matched donations will provide, we can really “kick it up a notch,” bringing our message to many more people who love the Blackwater Canyon.

Today, Springtime is coming to the Canyon. The rush of the waterfalls, the birds singing in the trees, the song of nature and glorious choir of the Creation, fills the Canyon.

*For the moment, at least, the chainsaws have been stilled — thanks to **your** concern and support.*

*But until we fully protect the Canyon, the chainsaws could start up again **at any time.***

Those birds singing in the Canyon are beginning to build their nests. Every good nest needs a solid foundation of support – and so does Friends of Blackwater.

*Won't you please make a donation — of whatever you can afford, **to help keep the Blackwater Canyon issue before the public.** And, your donation in March or April will get you entered in our **Springtime Sweepstakes** (details elsewhere in the newsletter)!*

*Please stay in touch, and know that we are **so grateful** for you and what we have accomplished together so far.*

Judy Rodd, Director, Friends of Blackwater

Blackwater Springtime Sweepstakes!

Heads Up!

Two fantastic grand prize packages will be awarded in Friends of Blackwater's Springtime Sweepstakes:

The “Blackwater Getaway Package”

This package includes a room at the Bright Morning Inn Bed and Breakfast, two tickets to a Mountain Music Weekend show at the Purple Fiddle in Thomas, dinner for two at Siriani's in Davis (yum, yum!), and a massage from the Highland Inn and Spa in Canaan Valley.

The “Enjoy The Blackwater Canyon from Home” Package

Not planning to be in the Blackwater area any time soon? This package includes a copy of The Blackwater Chronicle, a Save Blackwater Canyon t-shirt, a Limited edition Blackwater Poster, and The new Guidebook to Blackwater Falls State Park by Emily Grafton.

To be eligible for one of these prizes, just send us a letter, fax, or e-mail saying “Enter me in the Springtime Sweepstakes” during April. Be sure to specify which prize package you wish to try for. Of course, all donors during this period will be entered, as well, including website donations at www.saveblackwater.org by credit card. A drawing will be held on Friday, May 2, and the lucky winners will be notified on Monday, May 5. It could be you!

Be a double winner! Enter the sweepstakes for fabulous prizes and donate to Friends of Blackwater so we can win public ownership for the Canyon!!



North Fork Watershed Project Update

Spring has sprung in Tucker County and that means melting snow and high water on the North Fork of the Blackwater River. Phase One has been completed on a project to catalogue all of the Acid Mine Drainage sources impacting water quality in the river. With the help of Richard diPretoro, our consulting geologist from Pittsburgh, the North Fork Project will fill in any missing information to form a complete record of water quality data to complete Phase Two. The water quality directory will be used to prioritize and organize treatment options.

We are also adding a historical component to our project. The North Fork of the Blackwater River is rich in historic resources. There are stories to be told about the coke era. The North Fork office is looking for a student intern to work with the community on the history of Coketon and Thomas. (If you are interested, contact the North Fork office at 304-463-4068)

You can keep track of the North Fork Project by visiting www.northforkwatershed.org. Stop by the office on Front Street in Thomas if you are in the area. We have maps, stickers, and other information. We need volunteers to help with water quality monitoring, oral histories, and outreach and education.

WV Highway Department Speaks Out to Protect Blackwater Canyon for Tourism and Recreation

Friends of Blackwater gives high praise to the West Virginia Division of Highways for its opposition to Allegheny Wood Products' proposed logging road on the Blackwater Canyon Trail. The Division of Highways voiced its strong disapproval of the proposal in a letter to Clyde N. Thompson, supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest.

"It is our opinion that use of the railroad grade by Allegheny Wood Products may functionally impair the trail as a recreational resource. Timbering could degenerate, aesthetically, the natural feeling so important to the recreational use of that specific portion of the Blackwater Canyon," the letter from James E. Sothen said.

The letter also asks the Forest Service to continue to support the West Virginia Division of Highway's efforts to acquire land currently owned by Allegheny Wood Products as part of the recreational development plan to turn the "Blackwater Canyon into a regional showcase."

"The Division of Highways recognizes the Blackwater Canyon not only for its important natural and cultural resources, but also its potential to draw visitors and tourism dollars into West Virginia. The Division's support is invaluable as we continue to work to protect the Canyon and develop it for recreational use," said executive director Judy Rodd.

The DOH letter says that a new bicycle trail is currently under development for the Trail. Funding for the Trail will come from Corridor H money that is set aside to develop the tourism industry in the area. Additional state and federal dollars have also been allocated to increase recreational tourism opportunities in the Blackwater Canyon.

Thanks, WV DOH, for speaking out to protect West Virginia's Scenic Crown Jewel!

Keeping Dolly Sods Wild Citizens Work for Good Wind Siting Standards



Friends of Blackwater is supporting Friends of the Allegheny Front and Stewards of the Highlands to assure that a proposed wind turbine project does not violate endangered species laws and does not degrade the Dolly Sods and Fore Knobs area in Grant County, West Virginia.

Wind power is a promising energy alternative that almost everyone supports. But almost everyone also agrees that the **federal and state governments must develop siting criteria for wind electricity generating installations. Currently, there are no legal criteria for locating and permitting these huge wind turbine sites.**

Good siting criteria are essential to making wind energy truly environmentally benign. **These criteria must include protecting the local economy, local property owners, endangered species habitat — and our special places like Blackwater.**

Here are some facts you should know:

1. The NedPower Project would be in the scenic viewshed of the Monongahela National Forest and the Dolly Sods Wilderness. Two hundred lighted turbines would tower more than 400 feet above the natural landscape, along a swath ½ mile wide and 14 miles long.

2. Wind turbine electricity is currently financially viable only because of federal and state tax subsidies. These include a production tax credit, B & O taxes at a fraction of what other businesses pay, and property taxes based on just five percent of the property's value — compared to the 60 percent the rest of us pay.

3. Wind turbine installations are industrial sites that devalue neighboring property (especially for vacation and second-home use) and can undermine a growing tourism economy. A study in Denmark showed declining property values for homes and land near turbines, and a study in Wisconsin showed that residents did not want to live near the turbines because of noise and safety concerns.

4. The NedPower proposal includes endangered species habitat and threatens the West Virginia flying squirrel and Virginia big-eared bat. The turbines would threaten migratory songbirds that fly along the Allegheny Front. Friends of Blackwater joined with Defenders of Wildlife in filing a Notice under the Endangered Species Act, because we insist that all development in the Highlands comply with this crucial Act.

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A Friend of Blackwater, Sandy Fisher "Keeper of the Forest"

For the last 20 years Sandy Fisher has spent her time advocating for various causes. From her early days as a teacher in Walton, New York to serving as a legislative assistant to former West Virginia State Senator Charlotte Pritt, Sandy has been committed to helping others. Besides serving as one of the original members of Friends of Blackwater she has worked the past two years for West Virginia's forests as a researcher for the Timber Reform Project, funded by the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and the W. Alton Jones Foundation.

After gathering information from a booth set up during a Women's Commission meeting informing the public about the destruction of the Canyon, Sandy went home and searched through the attic for a scrap book she made when she was ten years old. "In the scrap book was a small black and white photograph I had taken on a family vacation to Blackwater. The photo was shot down the canyon. I considered that photograph prophetic. I decided right then and there I was going to fight to see that the canyon was saved!" Sandy began volunteering every week to protect the canyon. Eventually she became a board member.

Sandy's earliest work began in New York City with victims of poverty. She worked with families in crisis for the Department of Child Welfare. It was this work with mothers in the city that led Sandy to become active in the women's movement. In Elkins, Sandy advocated for textbook review, for women denied disability benefits and children abused by a state run children's home. It turns out Sandy's connection with the women's movement and now the environment is a perfect fit. She explains, "during the last election I discovered that polling had shown that in the voting booth, women lean toward legislation and candidates that protect the environment."

Without question, Sandy Fisher can be added to a list of women who are doing their part to protect the Blackwater Canyon and other special places in West Virginia for future generations.



Rebecca Lewis, helped out at the FOB office this winter. She recalls her time in the office:

"As I returned from West Africa not having a clue what to do for work, I luckily found a comfortable home at Friends of Blackwater. Although data entry and processing donations was not the most exciting line of work, I have enjoyed my time here and the people I have come in contact with. This spring I am moving to Alabama to teach environmental education at a residential camp. I am looking forward to my time in rural Alabama and am hoping I will get accepted to law school in the meantime. I graduated from Sweet Briar College in May 2002 with a degree in Environmental Science. I enjoy rock climbing, white water kayaking, and backpacking, and hope to

spend this summer hiking the International Appalachian Trail through Canada with a friend. Thank you Friends of Blackwater for all your support, and keep up the fight. Our forests are the most precious gift we have and the environmental cost of their loss is beyond any human's scope of thought."



Volunteer for Friends of Blackwater

Our volunteers are what makes us strong!! All types of volunteers are needed, in the field and in the office... give talks to groups on BWC using our slide show, lead tours through the Canyon, do trail maintenance in the Park, help with water testing at the North Fork office in Thomas, organize a musical event for Blackwater, write a Blackwater song, make donations of art for auctions, participate in research projects on the history of Coketon and the coke ovens, run a Blackwater booth at events like the Cheat Fest or Tim Gavin boat race at Harper's Ferry. Come to the office in Charleston or in Thomas and help with data entry, prepare newsletters for mailing, help with filing, help prepare a curriculum on Blackwater ecology for school children including activity sheets. Contact us at 1-877-WVA-LAND or visit www.saveblackwater.org.

Friends of Blackwater

www.saveblackwater.org
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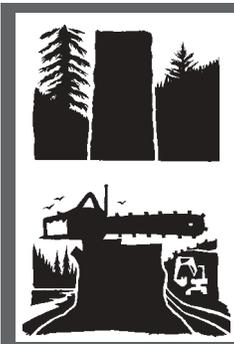
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Spring 2003

**Exciting news!! WV
Division of Highways
supports trail protection!!**

(see page 6)

in this issue: 10,000 Scoping
Comments received, Black-
water Spring Sweepstakes,
Book and T-shirt Sales, A
Tour of Blackwater Busi-
nesses, North Fork Water-
shed Update, Interview with
Sandy Fisher, Staff high-
lights, and more.



Thank You for all of your heart felt letters about how much the Blackwater Canyon Trail means to you! We apologize for the fact that the last action alert was mailed so late. **The Forest Service will take comments until the end of April** -- so if you haven't sent your comment in There is still time!! Here is a letter that H. John Rogers, one of West Virginia's best-known and funniest writers, sent to the Forest Service .

Sirs et Mesdames:

I am writing to request that you prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement before making any decision with regard to the application of Allegheny Wood Products. My reasons include the following:

1) Since the late 1950's, I have traveled extensively through our 55 counties and believe that the Blackwater Canyon is the single most wondrous place in W.Va. It is Longfellow's "forest primeval", the "sacred grove" of the English druids. (I would hasten to point out that I am a Methodist.)

2) Permitting the trail to become a logging road would totally destroy the ambience of the Canyon. It would do to the Canyon what the Interstates did to the Charleston of my youth, i.e., make it totally unrecognizable. The social calculus may have made the confluence of the Interstates in Charleston—on sum—a necessary change. However, no such argument is available to Allegheny Wood Products. The only beneficiary here would be Allegheny.

3) Allegheny's request is violative of the principle behind one of

Aesop's (d. circa 560 B.C.E.) fables, which has become a part of the natural law which, e.g., Justice Clarence Thomas finds incorporated into the U.S. Constitution.

As you may recall, this fable concerns a serpent who importunes a man to carry him across a river. When the inevitable happens—the snake bites the man—the man protests and the serpent replies: "You knew what I was when you picked me up."

John Crites knew what he was getting when he purchased the adjacent limber lands (at a discount because of the Canyon.) Mr. Crites tried to unload the property on the Underwood Administration and then he tried using helicopters to carry out the timber. (The several timber men whom I have represented in the practice of law tell me that the use of helicopters has never been economically feasible.) Mr. Crites is entitled to the benefit of his original bargain. He has no argument to support a claim for windfall profits at your hands.

Consequently, I would urge you to prepare a full and complete Environment Impact Statement before any consideration of Allegheny's request. You should consider what the availability of the Blackwater Canyon means to all West Virginians as "a bower quiet for us." [John Keats.]

Balanced against this you should consider that Allegheny's proposal will only benefit a single entity, a corporate entity which is now trying by the administrative process to improve upon its original purchase. This would work as an "unjust enrichment" of Allegheny and to the detriment of the citizenry, not only the residents of W.Va. but of vacationers from the entire eastern U.S.

If you should hold public hearings, I would—by this letter—request the opportunity to testify.

Thanking you in advance for your attention to this letter, I remain, Respectfully,

H. John Rogers