Friends of Blackwater

Please Help Save Our Mountain Home!

Flat-Spired Three-Toothed Snail

Cerulean Warbler

Cheat Mountain Salamander

Running Buffalo Clover

West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel

Indiana Bat

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

PO Box 247 - Thomas, WV 26292 - phone: 304-345-7663 - www.saveblackwater.org - info@saveblackwater.org
Friends of Blackwater supporters have been sending hundreds of letters and making dozens of calls to Congress to support the Endangered Species Act. And our voices are making a difference!

Massive public support from across America for the ESA paid off during negotiations for the Omnibus Spending Bill for 2018. Several “poison pill” amendments opposed by environmental groups were left out of the Omnibus. These provisions would have reduced Endangered Species Act protections for wildlife, including gray wolves, lesser prairie chickens, and Preble’s meadow jumping mice.

We also can celebrate the defeat of the House Farm Bill, which threatened the integrity of the Act.

But the fight to protect the ESA and the rare creatures that it serves continues.

The Budget for 2019 is in the works, and we are likely to see a renewed effort to get a bad Farm Bill passed. Please respond to our e-mails on these issues, and keep the pressure on.

Meanwhile, “Ginny”, the West Virginia northern flying squirrel, is up for her 5-year review under the management plan begun in 2013. Unfortunately, the cooperating agencies, which include two National Forests, the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge, the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, don’t seem to have done sufficient monitoring.

To understand how Ginny is doing, we are sending Freedom of Information Act requests to try to get hard data on squirrel numbers, and to ensure that these agencies follow the law. WVDNR records for the past 5 years show a downward trend in the number of squirrels monitored through nest box visits, with a low point being 5 squirrels caught in 2017. This is not good. We may have to go to court again to protect these rare Highlands creatures and their mountain home.

We never forget that extinction is forever. FOB is working to protect the bedrock federal law that protects biodiversity in the Highlands. With your help, we will continue to be a voice for creatures at risk.

Scientists study “Ginny” the flying squirrel
The Wild and Wonderful Wood Turtle –
A Gem of the Allegheny Highlands

By Steven Krichbaum, Ph.D. in ecology and evolutionary biology from Ohio University

The Wood Turtle (Glyptemys insculpta) occurs from northern West Virginia and Virginia through the northeastern US into southern Canada. They are “very rare and imperiled” and a “species of greatest conservation need” in WV’s wildlife conservation strategy.

Adult Wood Turtles have a brownish knobby carapace (upper shell) around 6 to 8 inches long with scutes (plates) that has concentric growth rings (annuli) similar to the growth rings on a tree. The hingeless plastron (lower shell) is yellowish with a dark blotch on each scute. Adults are often brightly colored with orange on the neck and limbs. They lay one clutch annually of around 10 eggs.

Wood Turtles are tolerant of cold climates, and are more active at lower temperatures than many other reptiles. In the winter they actually hibernate under water, and then become increasingly terrestrial during the summer. Wood Turtles typically are found in clear flowing, low gradient, rocky-bottomed waters and adjacent hardwood or mixed forests, meadows, and old fields. They are usually within 300 meters of water.

Favorite foods include mushrooms, herbaceous leaves, berries, and many kinds of small animals, including earthworms, insects, snails, slugs, and tadpoles. Wood Turtles sometimes climb into bushes to eat berries, and are known for “stomping on the ground” to draw earthworms to the surface to eat.

Wood Turtles do not reach maturity until they are around 14, and can live for more than sixty years. Slow growth and low reproductive potential means these turtles must survive and reproduce for decades just to replace themselves. Populations cannot sustain heavy adult mortality.

Man-made development of the Wood Turtle’s native range has degraded aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, shrunk available habitat, and fragmented populations – harming present populations and limiting their ability to repopulate areas. Global climate change also threatens their aquatic and terrestrial habitats. Populations may not be able to reproduce or survive long enough to make up for collection, predation, and road kill.

Nonetheless, there are opportunities for effective conservation action. Collection and poaching of wild Wood Turtles for pets needs to stop. We must also protect Turtle habitat (in the 300-meter buffer zones around streams) from logging, road building, burning, and other development. Preserving Wood Turtle populations and habitat in our National Forests and other public lands is critical for ensuring their long-term survival.

Wood Turtles depend on clean water and intact forests. The bottom line -- what's good for Wood Turtles is good for people too!

(Thanks, Steven, for this informative article. Right now there is a petition pending to protect the Wood Turtle under the Endangered Species Act. Please, help this effort -- go to the Friends of Blackwater website today, where you can tell Congress to preserve the ESA! And thanks for supporting FOB’s ESA protection work with your donations.)

Fun at Cheat Fest

Cheat Fest, the annual music festival held by Friends of the Cheat, seems to get bigger and better every year. This year was no exception, and spirits were high despite some rain Saturday afternoon. Friends of Blackwater had a table in the non-profit tent, and we enjoyed talking to festival-goers about our watershed restoration work and other programs. Despite its local roots, the event attracts people from across the country- we got a visit from a Friends of Blackwater member who lives in Michigan, and a former staffer who had travelled all the way from Texas.

Community Clean Up

On May 9th, Friends of Blackwater partnered with the Canaan Valley Institute, Davis Rotary Club and Q&A Associates for a community clean up in the town of Davis. Volunteers removed litter from along Route 32, Camp 70 and a section of Corridor H. It was great to see such high participation on a weekday, and we thank all of the volunteers.
LOGAN COUNTY RESIDENTS TAKE ON STATE PARK HUNTING

State Park Hunting Plan Lacks Scientific Support

The West Virginia Division of Natural Resources is planning to allow “pay-to-play” deer hunting in ten State Parks in 2018: in Beech Fork, Cacapon, Canaan Valley, Chief Logan, Lost River, North Bend, Pipestem, Stonewall Jackson, Twin Falls, and Watoga. For most Parks, hunting would take place over a 6-day period in the fall, with 9 days at North Bend.

After receiving calls from Friends of Blackwater members who are alarmed about this proposal, we decided to see how the public felt. We received nearly 200 responses to a survey, with the majority expressing concern about the hunting proposal. We delivered these responses to the Division of Natural Resources at a public meeting in Tucker County, that was also attended by several concerned citizens from Logan County.

The strongest opposition to hunting in state parks has come from the citizens of Logan County. The opposition has been spearheaded by veterinarian Dr. Scott Siegel and park lover Don McCloud. An online petition opposing hunting in Chief Logan has collected over 1700 signatures. The Logan County Commission, the Town of West Logan, and the Mayor of Logan have opposed deer hunting in the Park, as have state Delegates Rodighiero and Phillips and State Senator Ojeda. Local citizens opposed to Park hunting have held several meetings, and signs reading “No Hunting in Chief Logan” have sprung up across the county.

Don McCloud and Dr. Siegel were interviewed on several radio stations, including WVOW and Outdoors Today, and the Logan Banner has run several front-page stories on the issue. Citizens bought a quarter-page ad in the Charleston Gazette-Mail, helping to get statewide attention. Dr. Siegel and Delegate Rodighiero met with the Governor’s Chief of Staff to bring the issue to Governor Jim Justice’s attention. We are proud of their stand for their local State Park.

Local attorney Susan Perry filed a Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) request citing WV Code 20-5-2, which says that the Director of the DNR is authorized to promulgate rules “to permit and regulate the hunting of whitetail deer in any state park as deemed appropriate by the director to protect the ecological integrity of the area.”

The response yielded a lot of interesting information, according to Attorney Perry. There are no written studies which show that there is any overpopulation of deer in the park – in fact, there are NO written studies. The head of the Wildlife Resources Section of DNR to the Director of the DNR wrote, no data suggesting that a hunt is needed.

The DNR has delayed its decision on hunting in Chief Logan State Park. They should scrap the Park hunting plan, do more real research on the deer population, and meet with local residents. To let your voice be heard, call Governor Justice’s office at 304-558-2000, and ask him to cancel the hunt in Chief Logan.

Logan County residents protesting

The current deer population on Chief Logan State Park is not having significant negative impact on the park’s habitat or ecosystem function.” Therefore, there is
MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND EVENTS

Historic signage tour led by Chuck Nichols

Ian Smith leads the bike trip

at left: Installing signage at the depot site

Bike trip hits Canaan Loop road

Ian Smith leads the bike trip

Tour participants admire one the new signs

See next page for the full story on our new historical signs and tour
Historic Markers Celebrate Tucker County History

Thomas, WV - Starting on Saturday May 26th, Tucker County residents and visitors can enjoy five new historic interpretation signs along the Blackwater Canyon Rail Trail below the Town of Thomas. The signs are located at important local historic sites where remnants of structures like the former railroad depot, roundhouse, and machine shop are still visible.

Before the new signs were installed, these landmarks were easy to miss or misinterpret, but all that has changed. The large, professional signs highlight the existing structures while also providing fascinating photos and text describing what the area once looked like and how the railroad influenced the development of industry and patterns of immigration.

The conservation group Friends of Blackwater created the signs, with support from the West Virginia Humanities Council, the Tucker County Cultural District Authority, and the Tucker Community Foundation. A guided hike to unveil the signs, sponsored by Friends of Blackwater and hosted by Chuck Nichols, took place from 10 to noon on May 26th, and was attended by over 30 people. Friends of Blackwater is planning more local history events throughout the summer. For more information contact Friends of Blackwater at 304-345-7663.

Reprinted from The Parsons Advocate
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Reprinted from The Parsons Advocate
**MONONGAHELA NATIONAL FOREST NEWS**

*The one million acres of the Monongahela National Forest belong to you!*

**Here’s some news about your acreage:**

**Increased Timbering Proposed**

The U.S. Forest Service has shared projections for future timber harvesting on the Monongahela National Forest. In 2018, 15 million board feet of timber would be cut, affecting an estimated 21,228 acres. This would increase each year, reaching a projected 30 million board feet annually by 2022. It’s hard to accurately predict how many acres will be affected by doubling the cut, and for many of the years, the Forest Service just lists the projected acreage as being somewhere above 40,000. An increase this steep is alarming, although a lot depends on the specifics of where the timbering takes place and how it is managed. We will be watching any new timber proposals very closely, and are prepared to challenge any inappropriate or excessive harvesting. Stay tuned for updates and action alerts!

**Environmental Analysis Changes Proposed**

On March 12, 2018, the U.S. Forest Service held a meeting in Elkins to discuss possible changes to the environmental analysis process mandated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Friends of Blackwater staff attended, along with representatives of the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, the West Virginia Rivers Coalition, and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. The Forest Service presentation emphasized a need to “streamline” the environmental analysis process, to reduce decision-making time and the paperwork required.

There is good reason to question this reduction in environmental analysis, particularly where larger, more management intensive projects are concerned. Importantly, cutting back on analysis is not the only way to improve efficiency. Increases in staff devoted to handling permit applications could make the process faster, as could better up-front consultation with interested groups. Friends of Blackwater has commented on this to the Forest Service.

**The Big Picture**

On the Mon Forest, growing recreational use and awareness of the ecological impacts of timbering has often meant projects where timber harvest can be paired with goals like beneficial habitat enhancement. Pressure from Washington for more cutting and quicker analysis will make our Forest managers’ jobs – always a balancing act – that much harder.

Many of the “big old trees” of the Mon, now coming into their own, are the best possible habitat for “Ginny,” the West Virginia northern flying squirrel, and the constellation of rare species like Ginny that live in and depend on older growth areas of the Forest. The Monongahela, with its protective tree cover and rich soils, is also a carbon sink and a buffer against climate change for the world.

The National Forests belong to all of us and are meant to support many uses — including public uses like outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat, and ecological services (nature, clean water, and clean air). Today, the increasing and long-lasting value of the Mon lies in these public uses. We must always seek to strike the balance in their favor. Our descendants will thank us for a true conservation ethic.

The **Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage** took place in Tucker County on May 12th and 13th. This event was sponsored by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources and the West Virginia Garden Club, and featured tours in Blackwater Falls State Park and Canaan Valley. Our board member Jeannie Dalporto sent us these great photos from the event.
**WATERSHED UPDATE**

**Castor Canadensis (Beaver Creek) Update**

Despite being neighbors, the North Fork watershed and the Beaver Creek watershed are quite different in character and temperament. With its high elevation and low gradient, Beaver Creek quietly glides through a maze of wetlands that one would expect to find in Canada, while the North Fork (often loudly) rages down the Blackwater Canyon.

After nearly 18 months of freezing water, countless ticks, and the occasional beaver-caused flooding, FOB has completed its initial monitoring of the Beaver Creek watershed – and we found that the streams differ in other interesting ways as well.

On the plus side, typical pH values recorded on Beaver Creek were greater than 6, unlike in the North Fork, where we routinely see values below 5. Even in the headwater tributaries where sub-5 pH values were common, the areas were also characterized by low specific conductivity; a common natural scenario in watersheds dominated by acidic bogs and wetlands. With the extent of acid mine drainage seemingly more manageable, we are hopeful that small improvements will yield big results.

On the down side, the sources of degradation in Beaver Creek extend beyond just acid mine drainage. Over the decades, the spruce-dominated forest cover was largely replaced by a herbaceous shrub-like ecosystem. This has led to channelization, sedimentation, and temperature concerns that will require a more diverse set of solutions. Thankfully, our local partner the Canaan Valley Institute is an expert in this realm, and we are grateful to have their support and guidance.

As we move forward with our partners in developing a watershed-based plan for Beaver Creek, FOB would like to thank all the volunteers and donors whose generosity made the monitoring project – and all that is to come – possible. Y’all are great!

**First Brick in the WALD**

As part of our Beaver Creek project, FOB had the opportunity to make improvements to the inflow structure at the Wetland Anoxic Limestone Drain (WALD) adjacent to the North Fork of the Blackwater. Local craftsmen Lon Marshall and Tommy Ashton rebuilt the structure and were so generous with their time that FOB was able to have a local fabricator CNC create a v-notch weir plate that will greatly improve the accuracy and ease of measuring water volume.

FOB is taking the first steps on replacing the WALD. We are excited about what’s to come. At the beginning of May we sent out a Request for Proposals to a group of engineering firms, and hosted a site visit tour on the 15th. We will begin receiving proposed designs by mid-July, and by the end of August should be off and running! The Forest Service has been an invaluable partner in this process, so we would like to thank the folks at the Cheat-Potomac ranger district office who are helping make this all happen.

And again, huge thanks to all our volunteers and financial contributors whose generous time and funding are making all this possible!
Nearly 2 square miles of land along the Allegheny Front, the eastern rim of the Dolly Sods plateau in Grant County, has been donated to The Nature Conservancy of West Virginia to add to the conservancy’s existing, 477-acre Bear Rocks Preserve.

The 1,143-acre gift was made possible through donations from the Ann C. and Robert O. Orders Jr. Family Foundation and Maryland resident Dan Montgomery.

“For decades, we have worked with partners and supporters to protect the incredibly important Canaan Valley-Dolly Sods landscape as a keystone of the Central Appalachians,” Thomas Minney, state director of the Nature Conservancy in West Virginia, said in a news release.

“The Allegheny Front property is a biologically important gem and plays an immense role in West Virginia’s ability to support and promote tourism, provide drinking water and clean air to the Eastern United States and stand as a resilient stronghold for people and wildlife,” Minney said.

Mark your Calendars!

**July**
- July 1st, 1 to 3 p.m.: Lecture on Tucker County’s Immigrant History by Professor Hal Gorby of WVU at Cottrill’s Opera House in Thomas
- July 15th, 10 a.m. to noon: Old Growth Forest Hike with master naturalist Doug Wood, beginning at the Harold Walter Nature Center in Blackwater Falls State Park
- Be part of our Run for It team! Starting in July you can sign up to be part of the Friends of Blackwater team for Tucker County’s biggest annual charity event.

**August**
- August 11th: Henry Gassaway Davis’ Business Empire: Lecture by historian John Alexander Williams

**September**
- September 29th: Run For It and the Leaf Peepers Festival in Davis. Come support us at the race, then stick around for the Festival.

**October**
- October 5th through 7th: Friends of Blackwater will be have a booth at the Mountain State Forest Festival in Elkins.

*For more information on any of these events, contact us at 304-345-7663 or kate@saveblackwater.org*

ALLEGHENY FRONT PROTECTION SUCCESS

Land gift "more than doubles" size of Bear Rocks Preserve at Dolly Sods

Donna Cook, FOB Board Member and conservation hero, spent her childhood in the shadow of the Allegheny Front, under the Allegheny Fore Knobs. She wrote the following to explain why she and her husband Carroll have worked so hard and long to protect the landscape of her home:

“The Allegheny Front is the birthplace of my land ethics. I am of this place, and my lifetime dream is to preserve and protect the mountain. Our family farm, described in the deed book as the 21st section of the 1796 Chamber’s Survey, was first settled by my Great Grandfather in 1906. As a child, I remember following my Dad on hillside paths, trying to walk in his footsteps on the hills and ridges of the Allegheny. With neighbors, we drove cattle up the mountain to the head of the Stoney River Dam for summer range; we rode horses to gather and salt the cattle at Baker Sods and Sugar Ridge, and the Weimer Beech Woods, and picked berries in the huckleberry plains.

I was shocked and saddened when giant industrial wind turbines desecrated this magnificent wild place. Concern over this degradation of the landscape led me with Friends of Blackwater to begin discussions with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) about what could be done to protect the remaining wild places on our mountain, at least 10 years ago.

And that long, arduous conversation has paid off! Thanks to the outstanding leadership of TNC’s Thomas Minney, and his ability to collaborate, create trust, and foster working relationships with landowners and partners, a very special place on the Allegheny Plateau has been preserved. We celebrate this important land purchase that protects unique heath barrens, bogs, subalpine grass balds, sandstone cliffs, and Red spruce-Eastern hemlock/Great Rhododendron forests along the east side of the Dolly Sods plateau, and honors the natural heritage of Grant County.”

KENT MASON | Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy

This photo shows the 1,143 acres of land donated to The Nature Conservancy, from the vantage point of Bear Rocks Preserve.

MORGANTOWN CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

BY SARAH MARINO
The Dominion Post
Saturday marked the celebration of Earth Day around the globe. In Morgantown, families gathered at the Spruce Street Marketplace to commemorate the environmentally friendly holiday. There were some activities for kids, and various local groups came out to discuss their love and concern for the environment.

Tom Rodd, from Friends of Blackwater, was there to teach kids about the atmosphere and greenhouse gases.

Friends of Blackwater is a conservation group working to protect Blackwater Canyon. They also have programs devoted to children’s education called Kitchen Klimate Science. It offers hands-on activities for children and teaches them about global warming and climate change.

“We try to focus on how greenhouse gases are warming the planet, it’s a good thing in moderation, but when we overdo it, it’s dangerous. You sort of have to understand that the atmosphere is very sensitive,” Rodd said.

Rodd said it’s difficult to understand the idea of the atmosphere, and even adults have a hard time understanding its importance. He said obviously these kids have parents who are worried about their future, so when they see kids paying attention to the issue, it also shows parents the importance, too.

He also said technology lends a hand in impacting the environment. He said we have created fabulous technology that really helps us a lot, but it’s also got its risks and its downsides, so managing those is just as important as the positive things.

“Take a place like Morgantown. This is where the technology is being invented and discovered, so there’s a lot of people here who really want to manage technology better,” he said.

Managing the way we handle greenhouse gases is a difficult situation, but Rodd emphasized the subject is not going away time soon.

“We have to stop putting so many greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. We have to switch over to low carbon energy. It’s going to be really tough, but we don’t have any choice,” Rodd said.

He said celebrating things like Earth Day helps get kids interested and introduced to the importance of the atmosphere. He said his generation was not as careful about environmental issues, but teaching the youth about climate change, as well as adults, is key. He said our best hope is to slow the growth of greenhouse gases.

“This may be kind of our last chance. Once you put it in there, it’s really hard to get it out, that’s the problem,” he said.

Excerpt from Recovery: New Life in Coal Country

Ted Williams revisits West Virginia rivers: “When coal seams are ripped from the earth, rocks containing sulfur-bearing minerals get exposed to air and water, creating toxic cocktails of sulfuric acid and dissolved metals, usually iron. This acid mine drainage (AMD) can excise all life from a stream. And even where the kill is incomplete, iron precipitate can render the streambed unfit for fish spawning and benthic life by coating it with an armor-like layer of red, orange or yellow sediment — ‘yellow boy,’ as it’s called. Now Friends of Blackwater is designing a modern passive project that will drop the yellow boy in settling ponds…”

You can read the full article at https://blog.nature.org/science/2018/06/11/recovery-new-life-in-coal-country/

YES! I WANT TO JOIN FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER

CHOOSE A MEMBERSHIP LEVEL & SEND YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, AND E-MAIL TO FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER PO BOX 247 - THOMAS, WV 26292. You can also donate online!

_____ PORTE CRAYON SOCIETY $1,000 _____ FAMILY $ 50
_____ CROWN JEWEL CLUB $ 500 _____ INDIVIDUAL $ 35
_____ SUSTAINING STEWARD $ 250 _____ SENIOR $ 20
_____ PATRON $ 100 _____ STUDENT $ 10

NAME: ________________________________

ADDRESS: ________________________________

E-MAIL: ________________________________

William Wotring/The Dominion Post
Tom Rodd with Friends of Blackwater plays banjo and leads a group in a song at the Earth Day event Saturday.
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Check out our redesigned website, www.saveblackwater.org