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

PO Box 247 - Thomas, WV 26292 - phone: 304-345-7663 - https://saveblackwater.org - info@saveblackwater.org
Heritage Programs:
Good News for Historic Engineering Building

Right across the street from Friends of Blackwater’s office sits the former Davis Coal and Coke Company engineering building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its important role in the history of industry in the area.

When the coal industry was booming, miners from Thomas, Douglas, and other surrounding towns would have gone to this building to collect their pay – at first in “scrip” (currency issued by the company that was only good in the company store) and later in cash. The original bank vaults and teller windows are still in the building, along with many ledgers and other documents. Administrators, engineers, and other higher ranking employees worked on the upper floors, and the building was a hub of activity.

Friends of Blackwater has been interested in preserving the engineering building for many years, and with permission from the City of Thomas, we sent some of the documents to the West Virginia University archives for safe keeping. The City has made sure that the exterior walls and roof remained in good condition, but there was no funding to work on the structural problems inside the building. A section of flooring has caved in on the first floor, and a support wall in the basement has collapsed.

Friends of Blackwater has successfully applied for the building to be listed as an endangered property by the Preservation Alliance of West Virginia (“PAWV”). The endangered property designation will help attract attention to the engineering building’s deteriorating condition and allows us to get technical support from PAWV. We also worked with the City of Thomas and the Vandalia Heritage Foundation to apply for funds from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to stabilize the building. We recently found out that grant was successful, and we will be able to begin making repairs to the building later this year. Hooray!

Thank you to PAWV for listing the building and to the SHPO for approving our grant. Another big thank you goes to the City of Thomas, which owns the building and has been supportive of our efforts to preserve it.

Thank you to Jim Clark for letting us use the cover image. Jim is a West Virginia native who is now a nature photographer and instructor. To learn more visit http://jimclarkphoto.com/
Heritage Programs:  
“Shootout at the Depot - the Tucker County Trial of the Century”

On Sunday, July 7, 2019, Friends of Blackwater presented a “world premiere” performance of a dramatic Tucker County historic trial re-enactment, at Cottrill’s Opera House on Front Street in Thomas, West Virginia.

The new play, “Shootout at the Depot” -- the Tucker County Trial of the Century” is written by Tom Rodd and Priscilla Rodd, and it tells the story of a famous 1897 murder trial in the Tucker County seat of Parsons, a trial that was the subject of national publicity. In the case, the wealthy timber operator Frank Thompson was killed by a disgruntled logger, in a shootout in a train car that was waiting to climb the Blackwater Canyon from Parsons to Thomas.

The cast in the re-enactment included Cheri Platt, Justice Larry Starcher, Hugh Rogers, Kate Leary, Emily Cornell, Tom Rodd, and Judy Rodd. The hour-long show was an abridged version of the original trial transcript -- where there were dozens of witnesses, and some of the lawyers’ speeches lasted for two hours.

A packed house enjoyed the show, which included railroad songs and a question-and-answer period where relatives of the historical characters told stories. It is hoped the show will repeat later this year in Parsons. Friends of Blackwater thanks everyone for attending!

Tucker County Trials

On May 23rd at the Cottrill Opera House, guest lecturer Tom Rodd told stories from notable cases in Tucker County’s legal history. The historic space of the former theater made a great venue, and we want to thank the ArtSpring team for letting us use the space.

One of the key cases covered was Williams vs. Board of Education, which centered around the Cokeston Colored School, located just outside of Thomas. The case went all the way to the state Supreme Court and set the precedent that all students in West Virginia must receive the same education, regardless of race.

As part of the presentation, the audience got to read passages from the original court decision, and were surprised by some of the progressive ideas about the importance of education and fair treatment that were around even back in the 1890s. In the past, Friends of Blackwater has put on play’s reenacting Carrie William’s trial, and some photos of those events were part of the presentation, including a couple of cameos from audience members who had participated in the reenactment in Parsons.

After a brief intermission, attendees heard about another exciting case from Tucker County’s early history, which may be more notable for actions outside the courtroom than anything said before a judge. While attending a trial in Parsons, longtime business rivals Robert Eastham and Frank Thompson got in a shootout, leaving Thompson dead. Eastham was found guilty, but mysteriously escaped from the Parsons jail after only two months. The trial received sensationalized coverage both in the local press and some of the Virginia papers, which provides a good historical record.

Although Frank Thompson didn’t survive his feud with Robert Eastham, the Thompson family remained in Canaan Valley for many generations. Sara Fletcher, a Thompson descendant, was on hand to provide extra details for the lecture.

Thank you to everyone who attended the lecture!
Weaving through the Ages

Sara Thompson Fletcher was born in Canaan Valley and lives there today. She has seen many changes, but one thing has not changed – the importance of the ancient craft of fine hand weaving to her life and family.

Sarah’s father, Ben Thompson, was an extension agent who trained farmers in new agricultural techniques during the Great Depression. Ben met Sara’s mother, Dorothy, who lived in the town of Arthurdale in Preston County, West Virginia, a “New Deal” community which had community industries, including hand weaving.

Before she married Ben, Sarah’s mother travelled to Louisville, Kentucky, where she learned advanced weaving techniques – with the encouragement and support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who recognized Dorothy’s talent and industry. Sara’s father Ben was no stranger to weaving himself. On the walls of Sara’s weaving studio in Canaan Valley, “Ben’s Old Loom Barn,” Sara has pictures of Ben’s great-grandmother and grandmother, weaving and spinning.

Today, Sara continues the family weaving tradition, leading classes at the Loom Barn. Several dozen looms show shawls and blankets and plaids and patterns of all colors and designs, a weavers’ heaven. We were honored to have Sara Thompson Fletcher at two historical programs about Tucker County, to talk about her family, and we were fascinated by her stories of Canaan Valley going back many years.

Wheeling native creates beautiful art

Walk along the main street in Thomas, WV and you will no doubt be distracted by the unique art that decorates the windows of the many galleries that call Front Street home.

If you pause in front of Bloom (formerly Lamplight), artist Rosalie Haizlett’s illustrated map of Blackwater Falls State Park might draw you in.

A Wheeling, WV native, Rosalie has been illustrating stories and painting her natural surroundings since she was old enough to hold a brush. The daughter and granddaughter of a design professor and painter, respectively, creating and telling stories through art is written in her DNA. Her watercolors primarily feature whimsical but realistic bits of nature- ranging from ferns to mushrooms to flower buds to beavers. The ability to learn about her subjects while she paints and creates is why she’s chosen to focus on nature. Her “field palette” allows her to often capture the essence of each organism right there in their habitats.

Because Rosalie can create illustrated work for clients remotely, she operates a traveling illustration studio. In the past few years, she has lived and created art in South Korea, Jordan, France, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and most recently, the New River Gorge in West Virginia. She says it wasn’t until her time in the Smoky Mountains that she realized the incredible potential for education and connection that her art creates.

Hosting workshops and interacting with people eager to learn opens up the doors for conservation education. Her work features critters like the Cheat Mountain salamander, an endangered species, and illustrated maps of state parks that bring awareness to the scarcity and importance of protecting these creatures and the places that they call home.

Rosalie is spending the month of August in Maine, painting and learning about Puffins, but stop by Bloom in September or October to meet her and snag a beautiful little piece of WV to take home with you. You can also find her work on Etsy and in several other galleries around the area, featuring her most recently completed illustrated map of Dolly Sods.

https://www.etsy.com/shop/RosalieHaizlett
Watershed Work

Meet our New Watershed Project Manager

Hi supporters of FOB. My name is Emmie Cornell and I am brand new to WV, but I love it already. I feel so excited and honored to be a part of an organization with such an impactful mission! I grew up in Chattanooga, TN and graduated in 2018 from Berry College in Rome, GA with a biology degree and concentrations in botany and conservation. I have loved the outdoors since I can remember, and am dedicated to focusing my efforts in preserving and conserving the beauty and intrinsic value of Blackwater Canyon and our State parks.

During my summers at home in Tennessee, I volunteered and interned with TennesSEA/Caribbean SEA (student environmental alliance), a nonprofit that divides its efforts between the Tennessee Valley and several islands in the Caribbean to identify pollution sources, monitor watersheds, and engage the public, mostly children, about the value and need for clean water. I served as the water testing and mitigation leader in Chattanooga for two years, identifying unhealthy streams within two watersheds and providing the city with consistent watershed health data. During those summers, I helped lead the Kids4CleanWater camp, visiting different watersheds around Chattanooga with elementary and middle schoolers.

While at Berry College, I assisted with water testing on campus on and off, helping several professors with water quality related research projects. The majority of my student work time was spent as the project manager of the Agrobiodiversity Conservation Program, managing several gardens on an off campus, saving heirloom seeds, and leading educational and service groups in tours and work days in the gardens. One of those gardens was at a transitional homeless shelter and food pantry downtown, and after graduation, I was hired on as their urban farm manager and shelter nutritionist. I spent a year expanding the gardens, helping to start the second farm, learning to write grants, and assisting in feeding a community where fresh produce and healthy environments are hard to come by.

A year there taught me to love the earth and fueled my passion for environmental education. While I loved growing food and feeding people who truly needed healthy meals, farm managing isn’t what I wanted to do forever. When the opportunity to work for Friends of Blackwater came around and I was able to visit, there was no denying that this is where I wanted to be. I have big shoes to fill, but am thrilled to be able to help make a difference in such a beautiful part of the country and am excited to call Blackwater home.

New Project Design for North Fork Pollution Treatment

The plans for the new water quality improvement system that will replace the defunct Wetland Anoxic Limestone Drain (WALD) along the North Fork have been drawn up and once a few adjustments based the Forest Service suggestions are made, construction plans can be created. This will set the timeline of the WALD replacement back a bit, but will hopefully add to the sustainability and longevity of this treatment system.

Phase 1 will see two, 120 foot x 30 foot x 5 foot limestone leachbeds dug along the North Fork, filtering the heavy metals out of the water and raising the pH. This water will pour into a settling pond, allowing the metals to sink and be extracted, and then flow back into the North Fork where it’ll be on its way into the beautiful Blackwater River! Friends of Blackwater will, of course, be diligently monitoring this water to make sure that that limestone beds are doing their job and the freshly cleaned water is entering back into our river as it should be.

Hedin Environmental, the designer of this project, has successfully restored streams all over the area. The Pittsburgh Botanical Garden features an ingenious Zen garden with a wooden walkway that just so happens to traverse across— you guessed it—a limestone leachbed! Take a drive to the Botanical Gardens to check it out and get excited for the clean water that the WALD restoration project will be introducing back into the North Fork. http://pittsburghbotanicgarden.org/a-reclamation-story/
Proposed Changes to NEPA Threaten Public Input - Please Comment!

The analysis and public input procedures established under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) are incredibly important tools that allow the public to have a voice in the management of our public lands. They allow groups like Friends of Blackwater and individual citizens to submit comments and objections on projects on the Monongahela National Forest. However, proposed changes at the federal level could mean that fewer projects are subject to rigorous NEPA analysis and public comment.

The proposed changes would expand the number and type of projects that would fall under a project type called a categorical exclusion. The categorical exclusion is meant to provide a quick and easy analysis process for projects with minimal impact, including reduced opportunities for public comment.

Under the new proposed rules projects that include up to 4,200 acres of timbering or 5 miles of new road construction could now get a categorical exclusion. The Forest Service could bundle multiple eligible activities together to speed up the analysis process, and the new proposed rules weaken the criteria for which projects are allowed to take this analytical fast-track. These proposed changes would significantly increase the number of projects eligible for a categorical exclusion and therefore sharply cut down on public involvement.

The proposed changes also allow for the use of “determinations of NEPA adequacy”, which essentially allow the Forest Service to reuse old analytical documents if they believe that the new project is substantially similar to a project that they’ve done before. This ignores the fact that science, management practices, and conditions on the ground are constantly evolving, and by allowing the Forest Service to avoid publishing new analytical documents it again deprives the public of comment opportunities.

From now until August 12th, you have an opportunity to comment on these proposed changes, and it’s important to remember that agencies only count unique comments. Even if you start with a form letter, edit the text so that the agencies involved don’t ignore your comment. Go to https://saveblackwater.org/take-action/ to get started.

Take Action!

From now until August 12th you can comment on the proposed rollbacks to NEPA regulations. These proposed changes will decrease public input and make it easier to timber in our National Forests. If you go to https://saveblackwater.org/take-action/ you can comment online. You can also mail comments to NEPA Services Group, c/o Amy Barker; USDA Forest Service, 125 South State Street, Suite 1705, Salt Lake City, UT 84138.

Center for Biological Diversity, Our National Allies

As Friends of Blackwater began confronting the threat of increased timbering on public lands we got a lucky break – support from the Center for Biological Diversity. Help from this major national group not only gives us access to greater expertise, it also gets our comments taken more seriously, thanks to the Center’s reputation as an environmental champion. Here are a couple of key staffers we have worked with.

Jason Totoiu is our primary point of contact for work on Forest Service projects, co-authoring comments and offering a legal perspective on species conservation. Jason works in the Center’s Southeast region, and holds a bachelor’s degree from Emory and a law degree from Tulane. Before joining the Center he was executive director of the Everglades Law Center, where he worked to advance the restoration of America’s Everglades. A past co-chair of the Everglades Coalition, he currently serves on the board of the Asheville, N.C.-based Dogwood Alliance.

Tierra Curry focuses on the listing and recovery of endangered species and has consulted with us on species like the Elk River Crayfish. Prior to joining the Center in 2007 Tierra worked as an amphibian field biologist, conservation corps crew leader, and community organizer against mountaintop-removal coal mining. She holds a bachelor’s from Berea College and a master’s in biology from Portland State University.

Eric Glitzenstein formerly worked with Friends of Blackwater as part of the public-interest law firm Meyer & Glitzenstein and recently joined the Center for Biological Diversity team as Director of Litigation, where he oversees and coordinates litigation strategy for the Center. In the past Eric has also worked for the Public Citizen Litigation Group, and he holds a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center and a B.A. from Johns Hopkins University.
The Monongahela National Forest is headed for an increase in proposed timbering, and the pressure to “get out the cut” has led to several projects with serious drawbacks. Friends of Blackwater has submitted comments on four new projects, and is preparing to object to at least two.

The **Panther Ridge Project** is located in the Greenbrier River Watershed, with Droop Mountain to the north and Blue Bend to the south. This project is large in its scale – over 5,000 acres of prescribed burning, 1,218 acres of clearcutting, 2,748 of thinning (timbering that removes some of the trees), and more timbering to create wildlife openings and artificial “savannahs.”

Over 40% of the project area will be affected by tree removal, and 7.7 miles of new road will be built. This project area contains potential habitat for the federally listed Northern Long-eared Bat and Indiana Bat, as well as sensitive fish species like brook trout and tongue-tied minnow. The project area is near beloved recreation sites like the Greenbrier River Trail, Big Draft Wilderness, Spice Run Wilderness, Hopkins Mountain Scenic Overlook and Blue Bend swimming area and campground. The effects of this project have not been sufficiently evaluated, and Friends of Blackwater has filed an objection in partnership with the Center for Biological Diversity.

The **Big Rock Project** is located in the Cranberry River watershed, north of Richwood, and within the range of the endangered Candy Darter. With steep slopes, acidic soil, and a high risk of erosion, it is a difficult area to work in, but that isn’t stopping the Forest Service from proposing over 2400 acres of timbering, including rejecting an alternative plan that would have avoided building new roads. Significant work has taken place to fight stream acidification in the Cranberry watershed, and there are several Tier 3 trout streams in the project area.

The project was at one point going to face a higher level of environmental analysis, but the Forest Service dropped it back down to a lower level of analysis with no explanation. There are several campites and trails within the project area that will be impacted by timbering, and the project area borders the Cranberry Wilderness. Friends of Blackwater and the Center for Biological Diversity have filed an objection to the project.

The **Spruce Mountain Grouse Management Area Project** is located near Spruce Knob Lake. As originally written, this project would have involved timbering in over 80 acres of West Virginia northern flying squirrel habitat, which was an immediate cause for concern. The flying squirrel is not just our mascot, but also a sensitive species that is supposed to be protected on the Monongahela National Forest.

Several of our members sent letters asking the Forest Service not to timber in “Ginny’s” habitat, and we want you to know that your comments did make a difference. The project has been altered to reduce timbering in flying squirrel habitat down to roughly 10 acres, and more care has been taken to preserve habitat connectivity. We pushed for these changes in face to face meetings and feel that the project has improved.

**FOB Objections:** The top two projects are part of a larger pattern on Forest Service lands across the country – more timbering, with less thorough analysis of impacts. Most of the projects listed above failed to analyze a reasonable range of alternatives, offering only a choice between no action and the proposed action.

Friends of Blackwater, along with our partners at the Center for Biological Diversity, have filed objections to Panther Ridge and Big Rock and the bad precedent they set. In addition to thanking the Center for their involvement, we would also like thank the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, who consulted with us and submitted their own comments on these projects.
Accelerating global warming and climate change are affecting every facet of human life and well-being. Economic, physical, and mental injuries from increased heat and extreme weather – as well as the deadly political and national security impacts of global disease, food scarcity, and forced migration – these growing impacts and more threaten human health and safety worldwide.

What is at stake, and what can we do? At this free public educational program, attendees will hear and discuss presentations from experts in the field of climate change and public health – and learn about the latest developments, issues, and practices we can use to successfully confront this crisis.

The program will be held on Saturday, September 21, 2019 from 9:30 AM to 4:00 PM, at the West Virginia University College of Law Event Hall in Morgantown, WV.

Registration is free and includes a buffet luncheon at 12:00 noon.

To register, please visit https://saveblackwater.org/west-virginia-center-on-climate-change/climate-change-and-public-health and use the form at the bottom of the page.

This program is organized by the West Virginia University College of Law Center for Energy and Sustainable Development and the West Virginia Center on Climate Change (“WV3C”), a project of Friends of Blackwater, cooperating with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Public Health Training Center.

For the latest information, go to the program web page listed above, or contact the WV3C Project Director, Logan Thorne, 304-657-5455, logan.thorne.lt@gmail.com; or Friends of Blackwater, 304-345-7663, info@saveblackwater.org.
Research & Upcoming Events

Intrepid Flying Squirrel Researchers are on the “Night Shift!”

Thanks to many generous supporters, Friends of Blackwater is supporting exciting research on “Ginny,” the West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel. And that research is, well, sort of amazing!

Because “Ginny” is a nocturnal animal, Purdue University Researcher Ashley Archer is grabbing cat naps during the day, and spending her nights on foot in remote areas of the Monongahela National Forest, following squirrels that have been humanely captured and then fitted with “radio collars.”

In the past, Friends of Blackwater supporters sponsored ground-breaking research that used hairs from flying squirrels for isotopic analysis, which provides information about the squirrel’s diet. The squirrels could enter and exit a baited box and leave behind hair on a metal comb by the exit, without the researcher being present, making timing less crucial.

However, the hair sample study couldn’t tell much about how flying squirrels use different habitat areas and move through the forest, which is why this recent round of research focused on telemetry.

All experts agree that northern flying squirrels are a very rare and sensitive species (despite their being removed by the Bush Administration -- in our view, illegally -- from the endangered species list). The Monongahela National Forest contains the vast majority of Ginny’s habitat, so good research and informed management decisions in the Forest are crucial to Ginny’s survival.

Today, we would not have dedicated researchers like Ashley Archer on the ground without your support – thanks!

Join us for these fun events!

Keep up with the latest Friends of Blackwater events, and other fun events from other local organizations. You can always find our events online at https://saveblackwater.org/events/

August 12th – Deadline to comment on proposed NEPA revisions. See page 6 and 7 for more information.

August 12th and 13th – Watch the Perseid meteor shower at Blackwater Falls State Park. Meet at the nature center around 9 p.m.

August 16th – Take the Stop Extinction Challenge, a nationwide day of action in support of the Endangered Species Act. Visit your congressperson’s office, make a phone call or send a letter, and let us know what you did.

September 7th – Canaan Valley Resort is guiding a 10 mile hike down the Blackwater Canyon beginning at 9 a.m. There is a $15 fee to cover the cost of the shuttle.

September 21st – Climate Change and Public Health event in Morgantown. See page 8 for more information.

September 28th – “Run For It!”, and join Friends of Blackwater’s team for Tucker County’s favorite fundraiser. You have the option of doing a 5k run, 1 mile walk, or simply being a digital team member. Register at https://www.tuckerfoundation.net/run-2/entry-form/

September 28th – Visit the Leaf Peepers Festival in Davis. Friends of Blackwater will have a booth in the vendor area.

October 5th – “We are still here” powwow in Mill Race Park in Parsons. This first annual event will celebrate Native American culture in West Virginia.

October 6th – Barn Dance in Aurora. This fun annual event is a fundraiser for the Aurora Project, an arts organization based in Preston County.

Monthly water quality monitoring – We would love to get some new volunteers out on the North Fork or Beaver Creek to learn about water quality. Exact dates for our monthly water quality monitoring are weather-dependent. Email emmie@saveblackwater.org for more information.

WV Mushroom Club 15th Annual Foray

By Emmie Cornell

As you know if you’ve spent any amount of time in Blackwater State park, it is a bit of a rainforest! These moist conditions create perfect conditions for a huge variety of fungi to call Blackwater home. With so many different mediums to grow on, *shrooms from the very recognizable and tasty Chanterelles, to the beautiful but deadly Death Caps can find their preferred habitats and flourish. Mushroom lovers from across the state visit this area to hunt for, photograph, and admire the fungal diversity.

The WV Mushroom Club hosted their 15th Annual Foray in the park from July 19th-21st, and saw mushroom enthusiasts and foragers flock to this event. With a great mixture of speakers and experts, foray guests were treated to top notch mushroom identification, hunts, and workshops that covered a wide range of topics.

I attended the beginner identification workshop, with the intention to learn as much as possible about the truffles that grow in the area, a favorite food of Northern Flying Squirrels, but left with I.D. tips, new observational skills, and a bit of knowledge from local foragers about how to be a sustainable harvester.
ArtSpring Events

Over Memorial Day weekend Friends of Blackwater hosted a history talk and art reception at the Buxton and Landstreet building, as part of the ArtSpring Festival in Thomas.

The event started off with a brief talk about the history of the Buxton and Landstreet building and the adjacent Davis Coal and Coke Company administrative building, by Judy Rodd. The Buxton and Landstreet Company was a retail subsidiary of Davis Coal and Coke, meaning that it was a “company store” where employees shopped with scrip. Some of the original features are still around, like the glazed brick walls, which were designed to be easy to clean in the era when soot from coal production was a constant feature of life in Thomas. Laura Kuhns of the Vandalia Heritage Foundation was also on hand to add some information on how the building was preserved and redeveloped.

Next, artist Ruth Blackwell Rogers discussed her collection of nature-themed paintings, on display at the B&L. The series focuses on representing forest ecosystems around the world, from cold northern forests to tropical mangroves. Some of the pictures are drawn directly from life and others from second-hand accounts, but they all come from a place of gratitude for the important roles of these ecosystems. The audience also asked questions about technique and got to hear a little about how Rogers first got into painting. We want to thank Ruth for her inspiring talk! For the rest of the evening, visitors checked out the art and were treated to live music from Tom Rodd and Michael Kline.

Another Great Cheat Fest

Thank you to everyone who visited us at this year’s Cheat Fest!

We love participating in this annual event, which supports Friends of the Cheat’s watershed restoration work. It didn’t even rain too much this year, which is rare for Cheat Fest. It has been great to see this event grow from year to year, and 2019 was bigger than ever.

Earth Day Cleanup

On April 22nd, we celebrated Earth Day with a cleanup along Camp 70 road, just outside the town of Davis. This is a popular recreation area along the Blackwater River, but unfortunately a lot of use can also mean a lot of trash. We had great weather for the event, and got a lot done.

Thank you to everyone who attended! An extra thank you goes to the team from the Human Resources Development Foundation, who ended up staying even longer than the 2 hours we had originally planned.

Wildlife Lesson at Local School

On May 16th, Friends of Blackwater visited the Mountain Laurel Learning Cooperative in Thomas to talk about wildlife, in honor of Endangered Species Day. Students ranging from 3 all the way up to 12 listed and classified species, deciding which were domestic, which were wild but common, and which were wild and rare. Domestic animals were represented by a (well-behaved) live chicken, while the rarer species had to be represented with puppets and stuffed animals.

Students learned how an animals’ habitat requirements and ecological niche could determine whether they were rare or common, and recounted their own encounters with local wildlife. We were excited to see how many students could name not just common backyard animals but more unique species like hellbenders, flying squirrels and cheat mountain salamanders. Many students had seen bald eagles, and we talked about how Endangered Species Act protections helped that iconic species make a comeback.

Thank you to everyone at the Mountain Laurel Learning Cooperative for letting us join your class for the day!


**Friends of Blackwater Events**

**Canaan Valley Half Marathon**

Friends of Blackwater had a table at the Canaan Valley Half Marathon this April. This was the first year of the event, and we are looking forward to seeing how it grows in the future!

The finish line of the Canaan Valley Half Marathon.

**Students Learn About Environmental Justice**

Experience Learning, an education center based out of Spruce Knob that gets kids and adults out of the classroom and into their environments, brought a group of students from the Edmund Burke School in DC out to Tucker County for an environmental justice-themed day.

They started off in the Buxton and Landstreet Gallery, the old Company Store, where our offices are located, for a history lesson about the area. We talked about Henry Gassaway Davis and the industry that he created in these mountains, as well as the damage that that industry left behind. Briefly mentioning some of the protection and restoration that Friends of Blackwater is doing, we headed out to test some impaired water and visit the coke ovens and Douglas Falls.

A short drive on the rail trail along the North Fork brought us to the site of the future limestone leachbeds and retention pond that will clean polluted water that goes into the North Fork and eventually, the Blackwater River.

A little ways down, we stopped by the coke ovens and imagined ourselves as coke oven workers, shoveling coal in and shoveling coke out, night and day. The mines that the coal came out of still dump heavy metals and acids into the Blackwater River watershed.

Burke School’s newly established activism and justice group is only starting their work around the area, but we are so thankful to have been able to host them and look forward to partnering with and hosting them again next spring!

**In Memoriam:**

**Robert Leo Smith**

Robert Leo Smith, beloved professor of Wildlife Biology and Ecology at West Virginia University in Morgantown, died last summer. We are belatedly remembering him for his kind heart, his great scientific mind, his dedication to protecting the natural world and his love of squirrels. “Smitty” had retired to Pittsburgh, PA where he passed away on September 26, 2018. He was a Professor of Ecology at WVU for 42 years. Dr. Smith also authored Ecology and Field Biology, Ecology of Man, and Elements of Ecology, an acclaimed textbook now in its ninth edition. Smitty inspired us as students and supported Friends of Blackwater in our campaigns to protect “Ginny” the West Virginia northern flying squirrel.

**State Park Survey & Photo Contest**

We want to hear from you! From now until September 1st, you can participate in our state park survey and photo contest by visiting https://saveblackwater.org/state-parks/state-park-survey/ We are trying to learn more about how and why people use West Virginia’s state parks, and your best park pictures can win a prize! Rules, categories, and other details are on the website. Photos can be sent to emmie@saveblackwater.org.

You can also link to the survey from our state parks blog – https://saveblackwater.org/state-parks/ We have been using this blog to post fun articles spotlighting individual state parks, their history, and their economic contributions.

The blog, survey and photo contest are all part of our larger effort to build support for adequate, dedicated funding for state parks.

**Mail Survey & Photos to:**

Friends of Blackwater, PO Box 247, Thomas WV 26292
Bald Eagles killed at 2 major WV Industrial Wind Projects

The deaths of two protected bald eagles have just been reported, one at Nedpower Industrial Wind Project on the Allegheny Front and another at the New Creek Project just one ridge over to the east; the first reported bald eagle deaths at wind projects in the east. The proposed wind project Black Rock would threaten more raptors as it extends giant turbines up the ridgeline from Nedpower.