Friends of Blackwater
Climate Change Program Draws Big Crowd, Media Coverage

On September 21, Friends of Blackwater’s West Virginia Center on Climate Change held a successful educational program in Morgantown titled “Climate Change and Public Health: Addressing the Growing Crisis,” featuring a dozen expert presenters. More than 125 people attended. You can see links to the full conference webcast, a speaker list, photos from the event taken by FOB staffer Sean Coffers, and presentation slides -- all at wvcclimate.org.

Special thanks to our partners, the West Virginia University College of Law Center for Energy and Sustainable Development, and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Public Health Training Project. We will be holding more climate education programs -- for WVU students and for Master Naturalists -- in the Fall of 2019.

Corridor H Comments from 9.20.19

Friends of Blackwater submitted comments to the WV Department of Highways, on the “Preferred Alternative Route” between Davis and Thomas. This route would:

- Destroy habitat for the endangered Virginia Big Eared Bat.
- Negatively impact the historic Blackwater Industrial Complex.
- Release acid mine drainage (AMD) from old mines in the area.
- Create a barrier between Davis and Thomas with massive exits.
- Create safety issues near Tucker County High School.
- Destroy public lands and streams on the Mon National Forest.

FOB recommends the eastern route alternative north of Thomas followed by passing lanes going down the mountain after the High School.

ON THE COVER: BRICE SHIRBACH

Brice Shirbach is a photographer and writer for Pink Bike and has spent time in Davis documenting the amazing mountain biking trails and talented bikers who get to call this slice of West Virginia home. The maze of trails running through the public lands in Blackwater Falls State Park and Tucker County offer some of the best outdoor rec that West Virginia has to offer! Make sure to rent a mountain bike from Blackwater Bikes or bring your own to ride the trails next time you spend a day in beautiful Tucker County.

We’d also like to congratulate the West Virginia Land Trust for their recent purchase of the Yellow Creek Preserve, including Moon Rocks. This site is famous for incredible mountain biking and amazing rocky landscapes. They’ll be protecting this land for public use, adding to the outdoor recreation opportunities available in West Virginia.

go to the link to view more: http://bit.ly/briceshirbach

SPOTLIGHT: Betty L. Carson Harbert

Betty L. Carson Harbert, born in 1931, was a frequent visitor of Blackwater Falls State Park, starting before she was even born! This photo was taken by her fiancé Ralph Harbert around 1945-47 when she was 15-17 before the big rock fell off the top of the waterfall. She’s wearing a dress that her aunt made for her, likely constructed from colorfully printed feed sacks in typical fashion of that era. A lifelong resident of Doddridge County, she was a die-hard Mountaineer and proud of her state. West Virginia was truly “almost heaven” for this state-park-loving woman!

-Thanks to Rebecca Harbert for sharing
Tucker County Hero: Roxanne Tuesing

Roxanne Tuesing has set the Tucker County public service bar about as high as it can be set. Born and raised in Hendricks, WV, she has spent her whole life working for and serving her fellow Tucker County citizens. She started off her career working for the Board of Education, took a few years off to raise her three daughters, and picked up work again at the Tucker County Senior Center in 1981, rising to the position of Executive Director in 1986.

Under her leadership, the senior center went from 5 employees to 85, from an annual budget of $50,000 to over 1.8 million, from 1 building to 5, and fundraised for a fleet of vehicles to help serve seniors in all corners of the county. In 1987 they started offering in-home care and transportation to and from medical centers around the state. Drivers can stop by homes to help with meals, bathing, medicine, or whatever needs may be present. When she retired in 2018, the senior center was caring for over 150 individuals every single month!

A partnership with the Mountaineer Food Bank began in 1986, starting out with Roxanne picking up loads of non-perishable goods and as needs increased, the Food Bank sent out a truck to Tucker County, now dropping off about 15,000 pounds of food every month to be distributed. In addition to this, Roxanne coordinated Kroger and Walmart produce pick-ups twice a week, which she still continues, even in retirement. All of this food helps create the emergency meal packages that they distribute twice a winter, along with the 120 meals that the senior center serves every day.

In addition to serving senior citizens so well, Roxanne is also the unofficial “Bridge Witch” of Hendricks. She protects the Hendricks Park (especially the swinging bridge!), creating a beautiful community space for everyone in town to enjoy. She has been on the Hendricks Town Council, was the president of the Chamber of Commerce for 7 years, served on LEPC for 15 years, and has been on the Park Committee for 7 years. She helps with the Tucker County HS volleyball team, hosts weddings and other events at her beautiful home in Hendricks next to the Green Hole on the Cheat River, and makes sure that her town is cared for, no matter the need.

Hello From Staffer Sean Coffers

Hello Friends of Blackwater community! I am Sean Coffers, and I am so excited to be joining FOB team. I’m a Morgantown, WV area native, and I’ve recently moved back to my home state.

Growing up, I spent considerable time running, hiking, and getting lost in nature. This experience gave me a love of the natural environment and appreciation of how lucky we are in this state to have so much nature in our back yard.

I spent my college experience studying civil and environmental engineering and worked in a lab group focused on developing new approaches to the built environment, ranging from passive structures to sustainable concrete to integrated battery systems for solar and wind energy.

After college, I worked in New York City for several construction and real estate companies, focusing on sustainability. I worked on multiple LEED building and renovation projects as well as numerous other green projects. While this time in New York was fulfilling and rewarding, I always had a desire to come back to the Mountain State and have always considered it home. When I found myself at a personal crossroads and the possibility of joining Friends of Blackwater popped up, I jumped at the chance. I’m excited to dive into this work and community and become part of it. I look forward to the road that lies ahead.
Possible Future for the North Fork: DEP Treatment on Muddy Creek

The acid mine drainage discharging into the North Fork may have an expiration date! The Department of Environmental Protection’s Abandoned Mine Lands program is investigating ways to design and construct an active treatment site above the North Fork, collecting and treating the three main sources of bad water flowing into the North Fork: Long Run, Mine Portal 29, and Burn’s Blowout. FOB visited the DEP’s model project at the Muddy Creek active treatment site in Albright, WV, with members of the Forest Service, and got to learn all about the ways that they treat the acid mine drainage in Preston County.

Rather than common in-stream dosers, which add lime directly into the water to raise pH, this kind of treatment site is entirely out of the water. The water is treated with a lime slurry, raising the pH and forcing the heavy metals to clump together. In the case of the North Fork, this includes iron and aluminum, two metals that turn the rocks orange (iron) and the water bright blue (aluminum). These metals sink to the bottom of large treatment basins called clarifiers and are pumped out as “sludge”. The healthy water then flows back into the North Fork, ready to support aquatic life such as crawfish, trout, and bugs that form the bottom of the freshwater food chain.

FOB is excited to be a part of this project, which would restore the North Fork back to its former ecological health. Thank you for supporting Friends of Blackwater’s water monitoring throughout the years, without which this never would have happened!

New Book Tells Story of Blackwater Heroes Carrie Williams and J.R. Clifford

Many of our readers will know the story of Carrie Williams, the African American teacher at the Coketon Colored School in Tucker County, West Virginia in the 1890s, and her attorney John Robert Clifford, who bravely confronted an attempt to rob African American children of their educational rights. Friends of Blackwater has presented many programs and publications about Williams and Clifford over the past decade.

Now the Williams/Clifford story has been retold in a comprehensive new book by Kathleen Costantini, titled “An Allegheny Triumph of Justice: Carrie Williams’ Courageous Fight for Equal Rights in the Early Jim Crow Era,” published by 35th Star Publishing. Kathleen earned her B.A. in English Literature at the University of Detroit and her M.A. in English Literature at Fordham University. She lives in New York and is frequently in the Mountain State.

This new book brings together research from many sources, and is a significant and readable contribution to the history of civil rights in West Virginia. It would make a great present for history lovers of all ages! Friends of Blackwater has copies for sale at $24 each, shipping included; order on our website at saveblackwater.org.
Updated History: Restoration of the Davis Coal and Coke Administration Building

Located a mile south of the main part of Front Street in Thomas, the Davis Coal and Coke Administrative Building, commonly known as the Engineering Building, was once the headquarters of the coal industry in and around Thomas, WV. This building, having changing hands several times, has fallen into disuse, but has remained of local historical significance. Starting several years ago, groups including Friends of Blackwater, the Vandalia Heritage Foundation, and the City of Thomas have been dedicated to the restoration of the Engineering Building. We are excited to provide an update on our progress and discuss our planned next steps. This work continues as part of our mission to preserve the region’s cultural and industrial history.

Since receiving the grant from the State Historic Preservation Office to stabilize this building we have toured it with them to document work to be done. We are working with the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society, the WV Geological Society and the Opera House Board to clean out the building. It still contains coal samples in the form of core drillings, old payment ledgers and check stubs as well as Opera House seating and movie projectors. We will also be organizing cleanups to prepare for the stabilization work. Thanks to all the volunteers helping to clean out the building.

The next step in the restoration process will be to bid out and work with contractors to stabilize a foundation wall and reduce water infiltration into the basement. This work is critical to protecting the building and is planned to take place over the coming months. Under a grant from the Hart Family Fund we contracted with Cheryl Hargrove to develop an economic feasibility plan for the building. Ms. Hargrove is an expert in regional development, cultural and tourism strategy, and planning.

This assessment will help shine light on the building and will serve as a roadmap as we continue restoration and plan for the long-term use of the Engineering Building. We look forward to sharing these results with the community when the assessment is complete.

Blackwater Rail Trail Signage Expands!

Blackwater Rail Trail Signage Expands! Thanks to grants from the West Virginia Humanities Council and the Tucker County Cultural District Authority Friends of Blackwater has installed six new historic interpretive signs along the old railroad grade between Thomas and Douglas WV. This signage includes photos from local residents of Douglas and Thomas and features family stories of the industrial boom in Tucker County. The panels help explain the unique history of railroad, underground mines, the historic Engineering Building on the edge of Thomas, and old Mine Portal 29 which empties acid mine drainage from underground tunnels into the North Fork of the Blackwater River.

Thank you to David Vago for his creative design work on these signs, and to Joe Dumire, Stuart Thayer, Bill Crawford, and Rachelle and Arlie Davis for the many photos and information that helped FOB create these exceptional wayside markers. Thanks to Shannon Gray and the Purple Lizard Map Company for the brochure which includes a self-guided historic Rail Trail tour, with all 11 signs that FOB has installed along the Blackwater Rail Trail.

Jim Baczuk and Doyle Parsons install sign
Black Fork Grade
One of the most grueling rail operations in North America

Just below Douglas is the crest of a steep, 10-mile railroad grade. Trains from Elkins reached the grade in Hendricks, where crews added locomotives called “helpers.” Heavy locomotives could handle long trains in most places, but the 3% grade limited them to about ten cars, so a 90-car coal train could require nine locomotives. Downhill trips were also difficult: in the 19th century, brakemen walked the car tops to set each car’s brakes by hand. Later, air brakes could stop an entire train from a valve in the engine cab, but still required great skill for safe use.

“Then was a little piece of road along the track at each end of town, with a ‘W’ on it. There were wooden posts. That’s how they’d let you know they were coming into town. Of course, you’d actually hear them a lot farther out.”

“Living near the train track was noisy and dirty because the ash where the train track was went to the smokestack. Of course, you’d actually hear them a lot farther out.”

“Vicks would put sawdust on the road, which would make the train go slower, but the wheels would still slip and squeal. That generated a lot of smoke, which was bad. If it was a Monday and everyone had laundry hanging out on the line…”

Richard Crawford, recalling childhood in Douglas in the 1940s

At left, a short train crosses the Long Run bridge in Douglas, creating the steep, ten-car climbs from Hendricks. The high, muddy waters in the North Fork at left suggest that Douglas Falls, just downstream, is raging. Only a few of the duplex company houses remain today.

On a steep, twisting grade, errors or mechanical failure could cause disaster. In 1914, a freight train derailed, killing one person. A fire in 1906, above, killed one person. A mudslide in 1922 killed a crew member. In 1922, a mudslide of striking miners derailed in the Blackwater Canyon, as shown above right, killing one and prompting accusations of sabotage.

Before radios, phones, and digital signaling, train crews used hand and whistle signals to communicate with one another and relied on dispatchers’ written orders to know when and where to stop and wait for other trains. Alternating sending and receiving required good weather. A telegrapher ensured that every watch and clock on the railroad functioned properly and was set to precisely the same time. The watch at right belonged to a railroad worker from Douglas.

Here, a few years before 1900, a train is making its way uphill around a series of sharp curves in Blackwater Canyon with at least three locomotives.

Hendricks Grade
M.R.R.

You Are Here

Gracia Bridge (courtesy of Richard Crawford and family)
Black Star Images (courtesy of the Western Maryland Railway Historical Society collections)
Mine Portal No. 29
Contemporary Drainage Issues Highlight Historic Engineering Practices

This area, part of the community of Coketon, was once the site of a large coal mining and processing complex, pictured in the main photo below. Underground mining ended here in the 1950s. A few foundations remain, along with some coke ovens, but the mine buildings and community are mostly gone.

Today, natural ground water is acidified in the abandoned mine tunnels. This polluted water is called the Coketon Mine Pool. It enters the North Fork of the Blackwater at Portal 29, which is a low point in the tunnel system, and makes the North Fork the biggest source of pollution in the upper Cheat River watershed. In 1995, the mine opening was closed with a wet seal, and a passive water treatment system was installed. This system is no longer effective, but Friends of Blackwater works to monitor and improve the water quality in the North Fork.

The two upper photos at left show the 1995 cleanup and sealing of the Portal 29 mine opening. At the top is the portal prior to the work, and below is the partially finished seal. The center photo shows the treatment system under construction.

The two lower photos are before and after views of the rehabilitation of land covered by "sky" or mine waste piles, in the valley between Coketon and Douglass. The straight, light grey line is the railroad. The darker grey piles of waste in the upper photo were spread out and covered with a new layer of earth and grass fill, as shown in bottom.

Coal miners, like these workers in Coketon in 1904, above, often worried about immediate needs like safety and pay. Companies were concerned with profitable mining. Starting in the 1980s, the landscape around Thomas, Coketon, and Douglass went from virgin forest to stopped, industrial landscape, to the valley you see today – in about two times the average person's lifetime.

The main background image shows Coketon's industrial complex just upstream from the cleanup and portal site. Company this with the pictures at left to see how much the valley has changed in less than 100 years.
Ken Caplinger: State Parks are an Economic Engine

- Charleston Gazette Mail, Aug 10, 2019 EXCERPT

The West Virginia State Park System generates $248 million annually -- $189 million in direct economic impact, 3,209 jobs, and $91.6 million in worker pay. It is regarded as one of the finest state park systems in the nation. Our challenge is to keep it operating at a high and productive standard, by not allowing its luster and appeal to diminish.

Earlier this year, Governor Jim Justice announced a new 72-mile state park rail-trail along the Elk River in Clay and Kanawha counties. The Governor said, “People all over the country, all over the world look for places where they can experience the kind of outdoor recreation that we have literally in our backyard. It is unbelievable what this will do for an area of our state that is starving for this.”

Kudos to Governor Justice and our legislators for passing a bond issue to address $60 million of the $100 million backlog of park infrastructure repair and replacement needs. Now how do we go about addressing the remaining $40 million?

The answer is -- we need a dedicated source of regular funding for our state parks. Last session there was discussion of carving off a small percentage of the sales tax on out-of-state internet sales transactions for parks. It would be wise to place these funds in a protected state park endowment fund, where the annual interest would be used.

However we go about it, let’s assure that our wonderful state park system moves forward with a guarantee that its infrastructure will be protected and maintained, while continuing the benefits that our parks provide to our state and citizens.

Friends of Blackwater State Parks Campaign

Friends of Blackwater's State Parks Campaign works to preserve and protect nature and the outdoor recreation economy. We conducted a survey at the beginning of August, and we’d like to "shout out" the hundreds of people who took it. Additionally, thanks to everyone who participated or voted in our State Parks photo contest.

Beyond enjoying the 50 beautiful state parks in West Virginia, this campaign is about supporting our state legislators who support State Parks. Senate Bill 438 included $80 million for much needed park maintenance. We are urging $40 million more for park upkeep and construction projects. We are reminding legislators of the value of these state parks.

You can help by sharing your views through the links on our Facebook and website pages. Join the Campaign.

WV parks add over $250 million to our economy each year, so this investment is well worth it. Check your local state park calendars for events throughout the coming months. There will be star gazing, guided hikes, storytelling, and musical performances, just to name a few! Go check out a couple new state parks this fall. You might just discover a new favorite!

 TAKE ACTION!

Protect Blackwater Falls State Park and other WV State Parks by participating in our State Parks Campaign. Join the 230 other supporters who have taken action on our state parks campaign!

Go to link to support WV state parks: bit.ly/supportwvstateparks

Sunset view of Blackwater Canyon from Pendleton Point - photo by: Brian Sarfino
Friends of Blackwater Photo Contest Winners

We are excited to announce the winners of our 2019 state parks photo contest. After receiving over 50 submissions, our judges had a difficult, but enjoyable time reviewing the photos. The contest had three categories: “People in Parks,” “Scenery,” and “Wildlife.” Thanks to everyone who submitted photos showing your appreciation of our natural heritage and state parks!

1st PLACE

Sandra Miller - People in Parks - Blackwater Falls

Marissa Bennett - People in Parks - Audra State Park

Stephanie Sabourin - Scenery - Blackwater Falls State Park

Kendall Brumbaugh* - Scenery - Blackwater Falls State Park

Sherry Bailey - Wildlife - Coopers Rock State Park

Chance Raso - Wildlife - Carnifex Ferry Battlefield State Park

*PEOPLE’S CHOICE WINNER ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE
Environmental Education and Sensor Placement

The Mayfly automated sensors that we programmed with students this past spring have been installed and are recording data. Mountain Laurel Learning Cooperative’s seventh graders joined FOB staffers Emmie and Sean for a sensor placement and water quality volunteer morning on Beaver Creek on September 19th. They installed sensors, monitoring Beaver Creek as they walked upstream. During monthly assessments, a part of FOB’s water monitoring collection, the data from each of these sensors will be downloaded and graphed, creating a representation of the stream’s variability throughout the year.

On September 24th, Emmie visited Northern Garrett HS in Maryland to join their AP Environmental Science class for a water quality and stream health workshop at Bear Creek. Students installed one sensor, gathered data concerning the health of the creek, collected macroinvertebrates, and did stream evaluations, creating a holistic picture of the creek that afternoon. Bear Creek is pretty healthy! We found a variety of sensitive macroinvertebrates, discovered a pH of 6.8, and observed good stream cover and little erosion, all indicators of a healthy stream. The Envirothon Club, led by teacher Carrie Glass, volunteered to collect data from this sensor and graph the data themselves, encouraging students to learn about watershed health in their home town.

Coke Ovens and Engine House Spruced Up

Thank you to everyone who joined Friends of Blackwater in cleaning up the historic Coke Ovens along the North Fork on August 24th, and the Engine House foundation on September 14th, 2019. We weeded, clipped, mowed, and chopped the overgrown plants off of the ovens and widened the entrance, making it more accessible. The Engine House received a similar treatment and is more visible from the Rail Trail.

The five coke ovens seen from the Blackwater Rail Trail are a handful of the 570 Coke Ovens in Thomas that were used to refine coal into the hotter burning “coke” during the turn of the century.

The Engine House is an 80 yard concrete slab sitting along the Rail Trail, a legacy of the industrialization that took place in this area 100+ years ago.

Visitors can now easily stroll down the Thomas Rail Trail and admire these two historic remains, thanks to the hard work that FOB volunteers put in to ensure that these unique places remain accessible.
Circle items you want to order, including quantity and size. Send it in with the included remittance envelope or call 304-265-0018.

T-shirts are available from sizes S-XXL. Visit saveblackwater.org/shop for more options.
CONTENTS

PAGE 2: UPDATES
PAGE 3: PEOPLE HIGHLIGHTS
PAGE 4: NORTH FORK/CLIFFORD
PAGE 5-7: HERITAGE
PAGE 8: STATE PARK CAMPAIGN
PAGE 9: STATE PARK PHOTO CONTEST
PAGES 10: VOLUNTEERING
PAGE 11: HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE
PAGE 12: ORDER FORM

HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

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$48

An Allegheny Triumph of Justice
Kathleen Jackson Costantini
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Stories from West Virginia's Civil Rights History
$12.50

Mail to PO Box 247, Thomas WV 26292
For more options, go to page 11 and also visit: saveblackwater.org/shop