

# M Mountain State Sierran

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WINTER 2024



## WV Sierrans Gather in Ripley to Celebrate 40 Years

FULL STORY ON PAGE 4

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VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

# New Year's Resolutions!



BY JIM KOTCON

As a new year is about to get underway, the WV Chapter will need to adopt some new perspectives. It looks like Republicans are firmly entrenched in both federal and WV state offices, and it will be important to find ways to work with them. I think that means getting back to the roots of the conservation movement. We will need to emphasize fiscal responsibility and how the cost of pollution has a real impact.

The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign has used legal interventions and citizen organizing to require the coal industry to pay the true cost of coal. Those costs are especially acute here in West Virginia. We face the impacts of water and air pollution from mining activity. There is additional pollution associated with burning the coal and further impacts associated with the un-reclaimed mines and outdated power plants.

We have had a lot of successes through legal actions that require mines to clean up their water discharge. A major focus has been to assure that the government agencies that are supposed to regulate that industry will actually do their job.

Climate issues remain a top priority, especially as the energy industry evolves. Gas drilling has replaced coal mining as a huge pollution burden, even as the industry tries to claim gas is a "clean" fuel.

No better example exists than the so-called Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2). A recent public open house held by

## I ask that you pledge to keep holding our public officials accountable.

this government and industry collaborative had industry proponents doing a real sales pitch, insisting they had all the answers, even as the group asked for public input.

Fiscal responsibility means that decision-makers need to prevent these costs from being dumped onto taxpayers. We need to stop subsidizing the polluters, either

directly through tax credits and subsidies, or indirectly by allowing the polluters to evade their responsibilities and dump their business costs onto the public.

So, as you prepare your New Years resolutions, I ask that you pledge to keep holding our public officials accountable. Go to legislative meetings or county commission meetings. Write letters to the editor. Participate in rallies and lobby days. Help with fundraising for the causes you believe in. Maybe just join a conservation outing to see the lands we are fighting for!

If our members would do one event each month, it would dramatically shift the political power structure in West Virginia. And that is worth the effort!

### West Virginia Sierra Club Chapter Directory

Email contact for all officers and staff: [sierraclub.wv@gmail.com](mailto:sierraclub.wv@gmail.com)

*Term ends at first meeting of indicated year.*

#### CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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<b>James Lamp</b>	(’25)	304-244-9257
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#### EASTERN PANHANDLE GROUP EXCOMM

Currently Inactive.  
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<b>Chris Craig, Newsletter &amp; Outings</b>	304-433-1260
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#### REGIONAL SIERRA CLUB ORGANIZING STAFF

<b>Honey May, WV Chapter Director</b>	304-356-8774
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# Nature and Community Provide Answer to Burnout

DEAR FRIENDS,

**I'm writing to you today from a place of vulnerability — something I believe is essential as we continue our journey together. This past year has been one of the most challenging I've faced, despite my deep gratitude and joy over becoming the director of this wonderful chapter. Overcoming the internal challenges related to the Club's restructuring was exceedingly difficult. Then, right on the heels of the restructure, I began facing some fairly serious health issues that kept me from joining folks at the 40th-anniversary chapter SierraFest in October. And of course, our shared fight to transition West Virginia toward clean energy can test our strength even on the best days, but it seems especially daunting now that the election results are in.**



**BY HONEY MAY**

**I'll be honest: I've been on the verge of burnout.** In a state where fossil fuel interests dominate both the economy and the conversation, pushing for sustainable change feels like a Sisyphean task. I know you, too, are deeply committed to seeing our state thrive in cleaner, healthier ways, yet it can feel disheartening to face resistance from nearly every corner of the establishment. I, too, have felt the weariness and weight of that resistance.

Sierra Club has had its own ups and downs in the past couple of years, and I know that the recent restructuring has been difficult for many of you, as it has for me. Change is never easy, especially when it involves people we deeply value and respect. My hope is that, with renewed focus and alignment, we can continue to support our members and amplify the values that brought us here in the first place.

On top of these challenges, I have felt, along with others, an ever-growing anxiety about the political climate. The reality that Donald Trump will again lead our nation weighs heavily on my mind, and it has added to the sense of urgency and fatigue. The stakes feel incredibly high — for our environment, for our communities, and for the values we hold dear.

Luckily for me, my husband and I were recently invited by the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust to an artists' retreat on Pine Mountain in Eastern Kentucky. I was excited about going, about clearing my mind of all the heaviness. So, when the Friday evening social hour began with a discussion of mountaintop removal mining, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity (replete with quotes by Nietzsche), I feared that I would be overwhelmed by more grief and weariness, rather than be restored as I had hoped.

But, instead, I found that experiencing the beauty of the land over the course of several days, in the company of like-minded people, filled me with a sense of renewal and reminded me of why we do

what we do. I was able to remember what we are fighting *for* rather than what we are fighting *against*. It also underscored the importance of creating opportunities for others to experience nature's healing power firsthand.

That weekend has inspired me to prioritize our outings program as a way to invite more people into our work. I have redoubled my efforts to complete my own outings leader training, because I believe that building community in nature is not only restorative but is also a powerful way to bring others into the fold and to share the values that guide us. My hope is that our outings can become moments of connection, inspiring our communities across the state and cultivating new leaders who feel as deeply about this work as we do. Our outings chair, Chris Craig, has done a wonderful job of this, and now we have others who are leading outings as well! Furthermore, our own Adrienne Epley is a therapist who incorporates time in nature as a modality of healing, a concept I really appreciated as I watched the sun set over Nobby Rock on Pine Mountain.

All of this to say: I find myself leaning on the strength and resilience of this community. You are the reason I show up every day. You inspire me, and you remind me that we are not alone in this struggle. We are together, holding a vision of a better, cleaner, and more just future for West Virginia.

So I thank you for standing with me, for showing up despite the challenges, and for believing in this work. I encourage each of us to take care of ourselves and one another as we move forward. This work is long and hard, but together, we are stronger than the obstacles before us.

With gratitude and solidarity,

**Honey May**  
Chapter Director  
Sierra Club West Virginia

*P.S. I'm so glad to report that those in attendance at SierraFest, including Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous, had a fantastic time together!*



Kathy Gregg (second from left) leads a group in tree identification at the Cedar Lakes Arboretum during SierraFest. PHOTO BY ED WHEELLESS.

## CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

# SierraFest 2024

**Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter's SierraFest was held October 4-6 at Cedar Lakes Conference Center in Ripley. The gathering included presentations, group discussions, outings, and general camaraderie in honor of the chapter's 40th anniversary. (See Celebrating 40 Years, p.14.)**

The keynote address was given on Sunday by **Ben Jealous**, executive director of the Sierra Club. Jealous noted the need for a return to outings and land preservation as key missions for the club. He said that the club's fight against fossil fuels and climate change would continue, but that it must be in the context of getting people in touch with nature.

After making the other awards, **Jim Kotcon** was surprised by a special presentation by **Bill Price** on behalf of the chapter for Jim's nearly 40 years of dedicated service to the Sierra Club and the West Virginia environment.

Attendees had the chance to hear from many speakers and facilitators throughout the weekend. **Dennis Stottlemeyer**, Deputy Environmental Advocate for WV Department of Environmental Protection, introduced DEP's website and discussed ways activists could learn of permit

**The chapter wishes to acknowledge and thank treasurer CANDICE ELLIOTT for her planning, publicizing, and making arrangements for SierraFest.**

applications. **Jim Kotcon** presented the Chapter's political endorsements and led a workshop on energy issues within West Virginia. **Jennie Smith**, the new Executive Director of WV Rivers, discussed her goals and ways Sierrans could collaborate with her group for cleaner water. **Tyler Cannon** of WV Citizen Action Group spoke on the grassroots campaign against the Adams Fork ammonia plant proposed in Mingo County.

Sierra Ex-Comm member **Dani Parent** told of the methods and the importance of citizen monitoring of air quality in West Virginia. On Sunday a panel of WVU Sierrans, including **Cierra Hall**, **Baileigh Rhoads**, and **Lexi Gilliland**, presented on engaging GenZ in environmental action and organizations.

On Saturday night attendees were treated to a showing of the documentary film "Running for the Mountains," introduced by the film's main subject, former Mountain Party gubernatorial candidate **Jesse Johnson**.

Attendees also had the chance to get outside on what was a beautiful weekend. Outings chair **Chris Craig** led a hike on the nearby Bear Claw Trail and an evening stroll to the Cedar Lake's covered bridge. **Adrienne Epley Brown** led a group on an Ecotherapy walk, and **Kathy Gregg** helped a group identify trees in the Cedar Lakes arboretum.



**BY CHRIS CRAIG**





Above: Scenes from Bear Claw Trail and Covered Bridge Outings during SierraFest at Ripley's Cedar Lakes Conference Center. PHOTOS BY ED WHEELLESS AND DIANA PETERS.

Upper Right: Sierra Club Executive Director Ben Jealous (on left) and WV Chapter Chair Jim Kotcon present Rookie of the Year Award to WVU Student Bayleigh Rhoads. PHOTO BY ED NOLAN.



**Chapter Chair Jim Kotcon presented the chapter's awards on Saturday. Recipients included:**

- **ROOKIE OF THE YEAR AWARD**  
**Bayleigh Rhoads**, for her service as President of Sierra Student Coalition, and for the outstanding activity and increased number of participating students at West Virginia University.
- **CRANBERRY AWARD FOR COMMUNICATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**  
**Perry Bryant**, for his efforts to develop the WV Climate Alliance and successfully encourage passage of the Inflation Reduction Act.
- **SENECA AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**  
**Peter Morgan**, for his years of service in the legal battles against mountaintop removal mining in West Virginia.
- **CHAPTER SERVICE AWARD – FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE WV CHAPTER**  
**William (Bill) Price**, for his contributions to West Virginia, first as an environmental justice organizer, then with the Beyond Coal Campaign, and most recently as the Chapter Conservation Chair.
- **OUTSTANDING OUTINGS LEADER AWARD**  
**Chris Craig**, for his leadership in the chapter outings program and recruitment of new outings leaders.

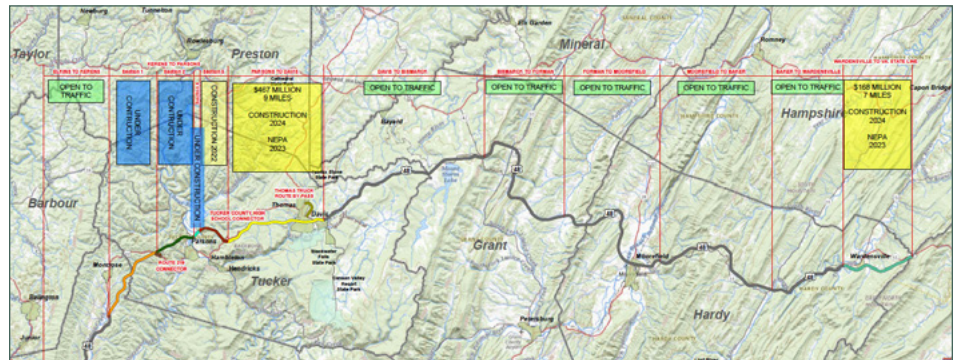


# Extending Corridor H: A Threat to the Cacapon River and Communities



BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON

An interstate highway brings many downsides for the people and ecosystems in its path. Corridor H, as we've covered in previous issues, would have a huge negative impact on the Blackwater River and Blackwater Canyon and on the towns of Thomas and Davis. But other areas will be similarly impacted if the last stretch of the highway is built — the 6.8 miles along Cacapon River between Wardensville and the Virginia Line.



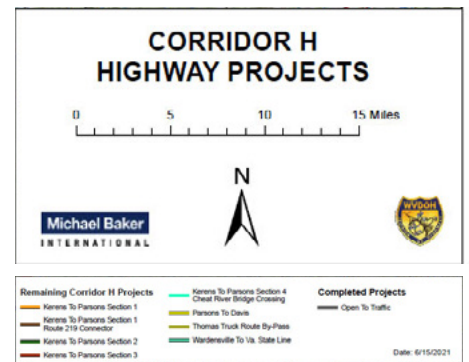
Map Courtesy of WVDOH

Virginia has no plans to continue the road from the West Virginia state line to I-81, so the current plan to extend West Virginia's four lanes to the state line would end on top of North Mountain and fade into two-lane Route 55, making it a "Road to Nowhere" and a big waste of taxpayer dollars.

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands, led by Bonni McKeown, has nominated the Cacapon River for **Most Endangered River** status with American Rivers for 2025. (The Blackwater River was granted this designation this year because of the Parsons-to-Davis section of Corridor H in Tucker County.) Reasons cited for Cacapon's designation include:

## THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ARE MANY:

- Corridor H construction would directly cross and compromise several streams, including two high-quality (Tier 3) trout streams — Waites Run and Trout Run — which feed directly into the Cacapon at Wardensville. It would impact karst terrain, including the spring that directly feeds the drinking water source for Wardensville.
- The proposed four-lane highway would bypass Wardensville's historic, newly thriving Main Street and would divert business to chain stores and gas stations rather than local business owners.
- By reducing shipping distances, Corridor H would enable polluting, inhumane Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) to get a bigger foothold in the area.
- By converting more forest and farmland to roads, pavement, and the development they spur, Corridor H would rob the area ecosystem of climate-mitigating vegetation and clean, clear water.
- By encouraging more automobile use, Corridor H would lead to more fossil fuel consumption. Currently, the amount of traffic and projected traffic does not justify a four-lane highway, but building bigger roads tends to attract more traffic.



An Environmental Assessment is scheduled to be issued late in 2024, and the public comment period will likely go into 2025. Upon approval of the assessment, highway construction will begin, unless massive public advocacy intervenes.

**An interstate brings many downsides for the people and ecosystems in its path...**

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# National Forest Service Spruce Reforestation Project

BY BETSY JAEGER LAWSON



*Fall season in the Mower Tract, looking north toward Elkins, Greenbrier Ranger District, Monongahela National Forest, Randolph County, West Virginia, October 3, 2018. USDA FOREST SERVICE PHOTO BY KELLY BRIDGES - PUBLIC DOMAIN.*

**Red spruce and red spruce-northern hardwood forests once dominated the highest elevations of West Virginia, covering more than 500,000 acres.** But early settlers burned thousands of acres of land on Spruce Mountain to create pasture for livestock. Later, timbering was the main industry in the area at the turn of the century, and the last stand of old growth timber was cut down in the late 1920s. By 1930, about 90 percent of high-elevation red spruce ecosystems in central and southern Appalachia had been logged, and subsequent wildfires diminished them further, encouraging an influx of non-native northern hardwoods. Today, West Virginia's remaining 29,600 acres of high-elevation red spruce forests are fragmented and have low genetic diversity, leaving them vulnerable to the effects of inbreeding and even less capable of adapting to climate change. Further, the conifer is outcompeted by broadleaf trees, which are more efficient at photosynthesis. And

with a long lifespan, red spruce is slow to colonize new suitable habitat as climatic conditions change.

In addition, acid rain, a result of burning fossil fuels, has taken a big toll on the spruce trees. With this background, the U.S. National Forest Service launched a red spruce restoration project for five national forests in Appalachia, including the Monongahela National Forest. This project expands existing efforts and cooperation from the Red Spruce Technical Advisory Board, a group of multiple stakeholders that includes the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI), to restore red spruce ecosystems on a regional scale. CASRI has already planted more than 1 million red spruce and other native trees and shrubs to restore a variety of red spruce ecosystems.

**Why is restoring red spruce forests important?** Several hundred species rely on the cool, damp habitat that characterizes red spruce forests, including the West Virginia

northern flying squirrel, the Cheat Mountain salamander, and the saw-whet owl. Going forward, central Appalachia will be a migration superhighway in the face of climate change as these species move up slopes and northward, providing migration paths for these species to find areas where they can survive. A warmer climate will not benefit red spruce forests, but once they are established, they will self-sustain in warmer temps, which is why it is essential to get these forests projects underway quickly.

The goal of such restoration projects is not just to get trees planted but to restore the overall watershed structure. Spruce-forest soils can store large amounts of carbon and absorb and hold water, which can prevent flash flooding and keep stream temperatures cool, supporting aquatic life such as the Eastern brook trout. Spruce forest restoration is "one of our best bets to build forest and climate resiliency," according to Kristopher Hennig of the Monongahela National Forest.

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# 2024 Election Recap

BY JIM KOTCON

**The Sierra Club's West Virginia political committee focused our 2024 endorsements on a few key races for the WV Legislature. We endorsed eleven candidates for House of Delegates and one state Senate candidate. In addition, the National Sierra Club endorsed Kamala Harris for president.**

By now, all of you know that Donald Trump was elected. The West Virginia elections also saw Republicans sweep many statewide and local races, usually by better than two-to-one margins. Eight of our endorsed candidates lost, as Republicans further expanded their super-majority in both the House of Delegates and State Senate in the Legislature.

Our winning candidates included Mike Pushkin, Evan Hansen, Anitra Hamilton, and Joseph De Soto. But Gina Milum, Jim McNeeley, Paul Detch, Jean Nutter, Diane Market Gaston, Bill Reger Nash, Lucia Valentine, and Maria Russo were unsuccessful.

At first glance, it may be difficult to see any bright spots from November 2024. But a few trends did emerge. First, in the legislative races where our members actively campaigned, the margin was much closer than for most statewide races. If our members held house parties, wrote letters to the editor, or helped with door-to-

door campaigning, our candidates did much better, with some races reduced to a 500-vote margin. Where we were not involved, margins were much larger. Raising awareness of environmental issues has the potential to significantly impact the results of local races.

Second, nationally, a number of climate referenda were decided in favor of the environment. Although none of these were in West Virginia, efforts to repeal clean energy laws in other states and initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases won in almost every case.

Finally, exit polls and surveys showed that candidates that campaigned on environmental issues generally, and climate issues specifically, did much better than those who ignored or hid their environmental leanings. Vice President Kamala Harris was clearly better on climate issues than Donald Trump, but her campaign did not

emphasize that difference enough in their messaging. As a result, young people in particular, who turned out in droves for Biden in 2020, either stayed home or split their vote, with a much higher proportion supporting Trump than in 2020.

We will want to think about how to better utilize these trends in 2026.

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**We will want to think about how to better utilize these trends in 2026**

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EXTENDING CORRIDOR H | [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6](#)

## What You Can Do:

**Stewards of the Potomac Highlands** has been helping inform Wardensville area residents about the impacts of the proposed Corridor H on the community. But they have no staff and are in dire need of volunteers to help spread the word. If you have the time and interest to help, you can contact **Bonni McKeown** at [barrelhbonni@yahoo.com](mailto:barrelhbonni@yahoo.com). Find more information at [potomachighlandstewards.org](http://potomachighlandstewards.org).

When the environmental assessment comes out, Stewards of the Potomac Highlands will notify other environmental groups, and you can write comment letters to **WV Department of Highways** ([travis.e.long@wv.gov](mailto:travis.e.long@wv.gov)) and to the **Federal Highway Authority** ([jason.workman@dot.com](mailto:jason.workman@dot.com)).

You can also contact federal, state, and local elected officials, asking for **WVDOH/FHWA** to do a full **NEPA-process/Environmental Impact Statement** analyzing all environmental and economic harms. We believe that such a review will not justify continuing Corridor H beyond its present terminus west of Wardensville.



Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter hosted its first bicycle outing on a beautiful October weekend. Ken Kendall and Tammy Vincent led a group of eight out of Big Pool, MD on the Western Maryland Bicycle Trail and the C&O Canal Towpath. In spite of one flat tire that delayed the return a bit, all agreed more bicycle rides should be scheduled in the future. PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.



# WVEC Sets Environmental Priorities, Welcomes New Lobbyist at Gathering



**BY QUENTON KING**

WVEC VICE PRESIDENT

In September, the West Virginia Environmental Council (WVEC) held its annual retreat at Tygart Lake State Park, where around 50 representatives of our member groups, including the Sierra Club, and other concerned citizens from across the state discussed emerging environmental issues facing the Mountain State and helped shape WVEC’s priorities for the upcoming 2025 legislative session.

After lively discussions about the advantages, pitfalls, and likelihood of impact for various issues, attendees voted on their top concerns:

**COMMUNITY AIR MONITORING:** This issue took many by surprise in 2024 when industry lobbyists proposed a bill to weaken community air monitoring programs. The bill would have essentially silenced data provided by citizens, even though the WV Department of Environmental Protection fully vets it. Thanks to WVEC and partners, the anti-monitoring bill was defeated but is expected to reemerge in 2025.

**PROTECTING NET METERING AND SOLAR POLICIES:** While there has been a nationwide boost in solar projects, West Virginia continues to invest heavily in fossil fuels, and solar growth has been slow. WVEC supported efforts in 2024 and will continue to protect net metering, which allows solar panel owners to sell excess energy back to the grid, making rooftop solar more viable. WVEC supports WV Solar United Neighbors in its efforts to pass community solar legislation, which would expand access beyond just homeowners.

**WATER QUALITY STANDARDS:** The legislature is revising water quality standards in 2025, with some positive changes like improved bacterial contamination restrictions and rules proposing regulation

for six “new” pollutants. However, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognizes an additional 24 pollutants as priority pollutants for public health that the state continues to exclude. Moreover, revisions include new categories for designating WV waters as “limited aquatic life” and “limited recreational contact,” which may undercut conservation and public access.

**PUBLIC LANDS PROTECTION:** Attendees prioritized defending public lands and trails from damage by off-road vehicles. Off-road vehicles, like ATVs, can damage wildlife, habitat, vegetation, and trails.

**ADDRESSING ORPHANED GAS WELLS:** Thousands of abandoned or orphaned wells sit unattended in the state, many leaking methane gas into the air, warming our planet. These wells pose a direct safety risk to nearby communities, as the gas-leaking wells can be poisonous or may explode.

The retreat also featured discussions on other emerging issues, like industry’s push for a fossil fuel-based hydrogen hub that could lock the state into continued greenhouse gas emissions. Attendees celebrated the recent sale of nearly 3,000 acres to the U.S. Forest Service, a long-standing goal of Friends of Blackwater. 🍃



*Kasey Russell returns to the state Capitol this year as WVEC’s new environmental lobbyist.*

## Welcome WVEC’s New Lobbyist, Kasey Russell!

**WVEC is excited to welcome Kasey Russell, our new lobbyist in Charleston.** Russell brings extensive experience advocating for environmental causes at the State Capitol. Russell moved to West Virginia in the 1990s and, after a few years back in her native Georgia, is returning to West Virginia. She has been deeply involved in water and air policy, green spaces, and forestry practices.

Russell has held various civic roles, including being on the Charleston City Council and the Kanawha County Solid Waste Authority. Kasey also has 13 years of experience lobbying at the WV State Capitol. She looks forward to representing WVEC’s partners and amplifying their priorities in the upcoming legislative session.

# Post-Election Reflection: The Need for Community

BY ADRIENNE EPLEY BROWN



**The feelings of anger, outrage, sadness, and disgust are overwhelming for many of us in the wake of the recent election.**

Despair is rampant among activists at this pivotal moment in history. We again face an administration that seeks to eliminate the rights of marginalized groups and power its efforts with a reliance on fossil fuel extraction. In our grief many of us are wondering what happened. How did we get here? What went wrong? The answer is multifaceted and intersectional, of course. As an ecotherapist, I'm focusing on community as a response to the challenges we are facing. Many Americans feel alone and isolated in a country that has encouraged us to dismiss our emotions in exchange for rugged individualism and personal success stories. People hungry for connection with others are easy to divide into groups. A lonely and fearful nation is easy to mobilize with hatred. Some have found it difficult to express any feelings other than anger.

However, anger is an expression of other underlying emotions. It can be a useful tool to motivate us and bring about change. But anger and blame cannot heal our pain, assuage fear, bring about understanding, or prepare for a harmonious future. These require a community based on understanding, interdependence, authentic human emotions, and collaboration with others with diverse perspectives. Only in that kind of community can we create a future based on healing and love for each other and for the world.

When we gathered in Ripley for October's SierraFest, I realized it was community that drew me to the Sierra Club. Sierra Club's WV Chapter was rooted in community, and that has been key to its success. I felt relief seeing members I'd been unable to see for months.

We are now heading into the winter season of darkness and rest. We find ourselves once again in a time of transition. There lies fear, but also potential. It is a time for turning inward. There is opportunity for reflection, healing, and dreams of how we move forward collectively with new cultural narratives. I look forward to seeing you on the trail. Our beautiful Sierra Club is a space for not only action, but also connection and community healing rooted in love. 🌿

## REFORESTATION PROJECT | [CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7](#)

The Forest Service began a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis to outline the restoration process. So far, large parts of Spruce Knob, Cheat Mountain, and the Cranberry Wilderness have been selected for restoration in the Monongahela National Forest. Depending on the characteristics of each site, the Forest Service will underplant in hardwood forests and plant in open areas and legacy mine lands suffering from compacted, nutrient-depleted soil, as well as along stream banks where erosion and sedimentation negatively affect aquatic habitats. In mixed forests, hardwood trees that might compete with red spruce trees will be removed. In existing spruce forests, efforts to add downed debris and create a multi-level canopy are intended to promote habitat complexity.

The National Forest Service is seeking public involvement and comment on this project as well as other spruce initiatives that they are

working on. The scoping period started August 8, 2024 and a final environmental assessment is expected by August 1, 2025. Implementation is estimated to begin September 1, 2025.

Given the Forest Service's practice of logging to generate their own income, we must ensure that the restoration focuses on ecological benefits, that old growth trees aren't sacrificed, and that the plan is well-researched and science-based. The official comment period ended September 5, 2024. However, comments will be accepted at any time.

**For more information, go to:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/red-spruce>

Along with the National Old Growth Amendment we wrote about in the fall issue of the Mountain State Sierran, this may be our last, best opportunity to undo the environmental degradation of previous generations.



*Volunteers planting spruce trees on the Mower Tract, Greenbrier Ranger District, Monongahela National Forest, Randolph County, West Virginia, May 16, 2019.*  
FOREST SERVICE PHOTO BY KELLY BRIDGES - PUBLIC DOMAIN.



# Camping the Byways of West Virginia



**BY AILEEN CURFMAN**

**Camping is one of the most popular outdoor activities in West Virginia, with almost endless options.** At one extreme, you'll find families relaxing in RV resorts that offer swimming pools, souvenir shops, snack bars, and planned activities for all age groups. At the other, you'll find people backpacking into wilderness areas like Dolly Sods. In between, there are state park campgrounds, national forest campgrounds, and low-key, privately owned campgrounds that offer a few basic amenities.

However, you may not know of another option. Dispersed camping offers a remote setting without requiring you to load all your stuff on your aching back. In West Virginia, most of these sites are located along isolated roads in the Monongahela National Forest. Most are tent sites, although some will accommodate smaller RVs.

This form of camping isn't for everyone. The sites are first-come, first-served, so you'll need a Plan B if your site is taken. Often the only

amenity is a place to pull off the road. There's often no picnic table, no water faucet, and no restroom.. There may be a vault toilet in the area, but at many locations you'll need to bring a portable toilet or "wag bags." You'll need to bring your water and all your other supplies. You'll have to pack out your trash. There's no security patrol. Some of the roads are barely suitable for passenger cars, with little space to turn your vehicle around. It's unlikely that you'll have cell service, so help is not just a phone call away.

Why would anyone camp under these conditions? Do you prefer listening to the murmuring of trees instead of an outdoor large-screen TV next door? Would you like to see the stars in a dark sky rather than being blinded by a string of LED lights in the campsite next to yours? Would you like to walk to a good fishing spot, or follow the road to a trailhead? If you're answering "yes," maybe this kind of camping is for you.



*Although this campsite is in a designated campground in Pennsylvania's Caledonia State Park, it resembles some of the dispersed roadside spots found in Monongahela National Forest and elsewhere in West Virginia.*

PHOTO BY AILEEN CURFMAN.

*No turning back on the quiet Canaan Loop Road, near Davis, WV, but ahead lie great spots for dispersed camping.*

PHOTO BY AILEEN CURFMAN.



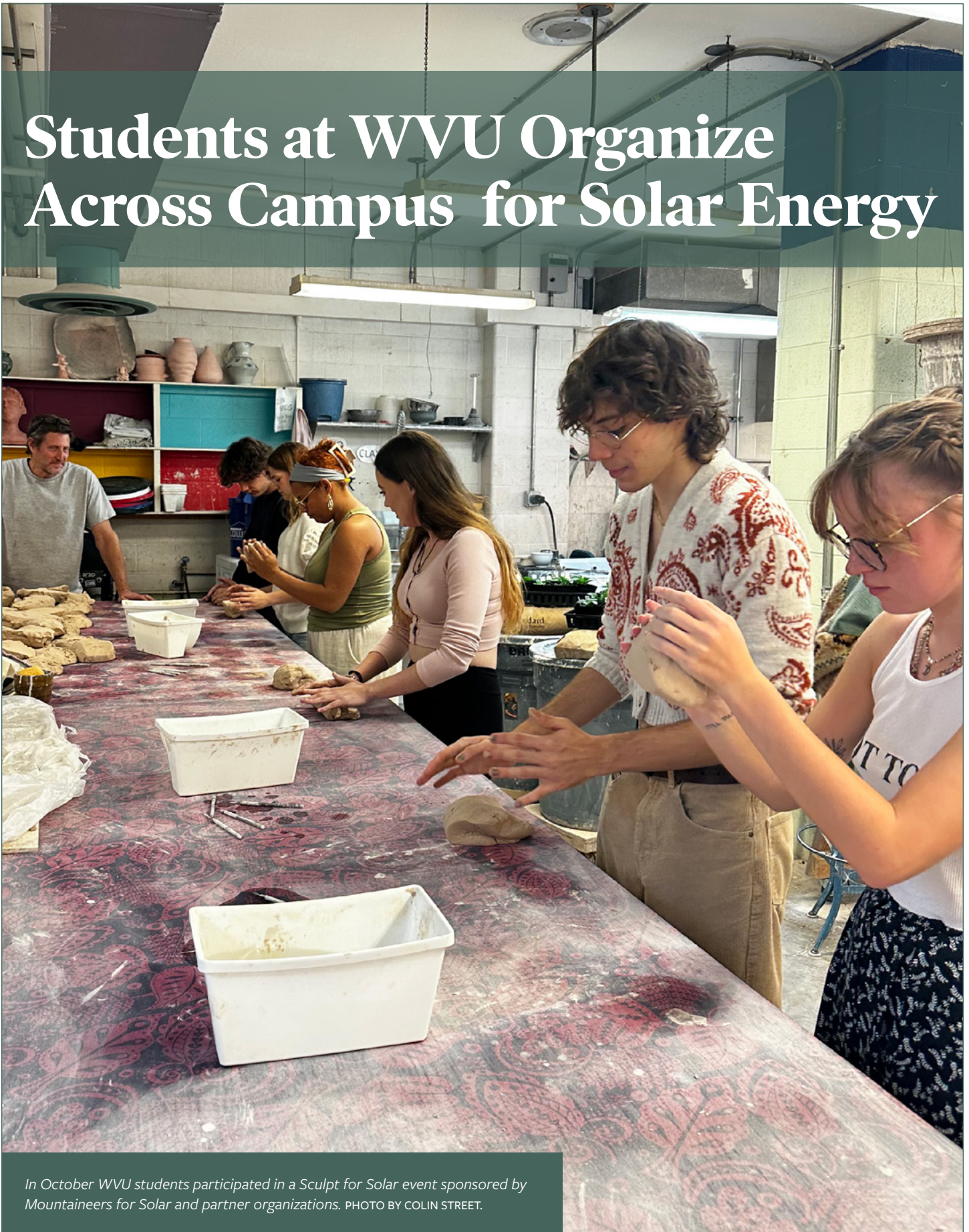
## Intrigued? Browse Some Options:

- **CANAAN LOOP ROAD** offers roadside camping near hiking and biking trailheads, or you can bike the road. These sites are most suitable for tents, small vans, or truck campers. **WEB: [tinyurl.com/mss-camping-1](http://tinyurl.com/mss-camping-1)**
- **GANDY CREEK DISPERSED CAMPING** offers hiking trails and fishing, and the site is not far from Spruce Knob and Spruce Knob Lake. **WEB: [tinyurl.com/mss-camping-2](http://tinyurl.com/mss-camping-2) [tinyurl.com/mss-camping-3](http://tinyurl.com/mss-camping-3)**
- **THE CRANBERRY RIVER SITES** include fourteen numbered primitive campsites along a 5-mile section of the lower Cranberry River. Motorhomes and travel trailers are permitted. The two vault toilets are closed in winter. **WEB: [tinyurl.com/mss-camping-4](http://tinyurl.com/mss-camping-4)**
- **THE WILLIAMS RIVER SITES** are 30 separate, rustic campsites located along Williams River Road. Many of these sites are popular with anglers. **WEB: [tinyurl.com/mss-camping-5](http://tinyurl.com/mss-camping-5)**

Video tours of these areas can be found on youtube.com, and the forest district offices are a great source of information and advice. To ensure you're comfortable with the access road and the site, you may want to take a scouting trip before packing up and heading out. Explore and enjoy!



# Students at WVU Organize Across Campus for Solar Energy



*In October WVU students participated in a Sculpt for Solar event sponsored by Mountaineers for Solar and partner organizations. PHOTO BY COLIN STREET.*



**In light of the “academic transformation” directed by the WVU Board of Governors, students have banded together in countless ways to find a way for our school to reduce its long-term costs while fulfilling its land grant mission of service to the Mountain State.** The solution we found is simple: Go solar! By bringing together students, faculty, alumni, and organizations into a single coalition called Mountaineers for Solar, as well as holding several grassroots fundraising and awareness events, we’re mounting pressure on the university to make the leap to solar in order to create a more sustainable and fiscally responsible WVU for years to come.

This movement started last year, when the Student Government Association, armed with the Student Sierra Coalition’s university solar petition, went to WVU’s Director of Facilities to explore the prospects of implementing rooftop solar on campus. In this inquiry, we were told that we needed to “match green with green,” implying that any investment in any sustainability project on campus would have to yield a financial return for the University in order to come to fruition. Instead of waiting for someone to present data to us, we rolled up our sleeves and partnered with the Land Use and Sustainable Development Law Clinic at the WVU College of Law to perform a student-led, rooftop solar feasibility study of 14 campus buildings.

While working with the law school, we found that the numbers did pan out for solar to be profitable at the university in the long run (7 to 25 years), with profit margins varying by school sector. Following



*Sierra Swing event at the music venue 123 Pleasant Street. Proceeds from this event went to support powering the university with solar power.*

PHOTO BY COLIN STREET.



**BY COLIN STREET**

**MOUNTAIN STATE  
SIERRA COALITION**

the completion of this project, we learned that the law school had acquired a \$46,000 grant for rooftop solar in Morgantown in 2019; however, due to lack of policy support and lack of student mobilization, the money was never used and has been sitting in a WVU account for the past five years. With the financial data in hand, we located the exact WVU account the grant money was placed into and began tackling the final piece of the puzzle: student engagement.

Mountaineers for Solar aims to get people on and off campus involved with our push for solar adoption. Particularly, we work with our coalition members to hold events that display student support through fundraising. The first of these events was held in October, where we partnered with the WVU Craft Center and the WVU Horticulture Club to hold our Sculpt for Solar event. Participants paid a small fee and received a pot, a plant, and a pottery class. In November, we revived the Sierra Swing — an event held prior to the COVID-19 pandemic by the Student Sierra Coalition and the music venue 123 Pleasant Street — with a solar twist. We got six local bands and three local art vendors to come together for a four-hour benefit concert that attracted over 100 people. With these two events alone, we’ve already managed to raise over \$500 for rooftop solar at the Morgantown campus!

While we’ve seen ample support for our movement in our first couple of months, this is just the start. We have several more events planned and much more work to do to ensure our mission becomes reality. If you’d like to keep up with the latest on our end, follow us on Instagram @solaratwvu or, if you’d like to get involved with our mission, send us an email [mountaineersforsolarwvu@gmail.com](mailto:mountaineersforsolarwvu@gmail.com).

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**The solution we  
found is simple:  
Go Solar!**

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November 1984 Outing – Members of the new WV Chapter enjoyed some outdoor time at Gaudineer Knob during the 1984 planning retreat at Huttonsville’s Catholic Conference Center.

# Celebrating 40 Years of Exploring, Enjoying, and Protecting the Wild and Wonderful Lands of West Virginia!



**BY KATHY GREGG**

**O**nce upon a time Sierrans in West Virginia were a group within the Sierra Club Potomac Chapter. By the early 1980s we were quite active: We sent several hundred petitions to oust then-Secretary of the Interior James Watt, held Executive Committee meetings to meet environmental challenges, enjoyed outings, and gathered for picnics. In late 1983, we determined we could be much more effective as an independent Sierra

Club chapter. We formally applied for and were granted chapter status in May 1984. Our first organizational meeting was held on the campus of WV Wesleyan College in September of that year, with the national Club President Sue Merrow attending, along with singer-songwriter Kate Long, who wrote special songs for us. At the first official ExCom meeting, held in January 1985, Interim Chapter Chair Kathy Gregg handed over the gavel to Chris DeChristopher. Soon

thereafter, we held our first chapter-wide planning retreat at the Catholic Conference Center in Huttonsville, WV. Our first major project was playing an instrumental role in seeing that 96,000 acres of the Monongahela National Forest would be preserved as roadless areas in the U.S. Forest Service’s 1984-85 plan. In 2009 that work resulted in three new wilderness areas, as well as additions to those areas originally designated in 1975 and 1983. We not only preserve wild





WV Sierrans meet at West Virginia Wesleyan College to organize the new chapter in 1984.  
PHOTO BY KATHY GREGG.

areas but have explored and enjoyed the outdoors through our Outings Program led by highly trained outings leaders.

Over the years we have fought the contamination of clean air and water through workshops, protests, and lawsuits. We helped stop PATH (Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline) in 2011, a project that would have cut a 290-mile-long swath across the state. We helped prevent utilities from charging West Virginia customers for

expensive power plant ownership transfers in 2013 and 2018.

With workshops and academies, we've educated ourselves and others about environmental threats from acid rain, coal mining, and fracking. The Sierra Student Coalition at WVU has been successful in introducing young people to the importance of sustainability. And during all these years we have celebrated and strengthened our connections during SierraFests, where we've

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**DEADLINE FOR THE 2025 SPRING ISSUE:  
FEBRUARY 1, 2025**

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Opinions expressed in the *Mountain State Sierran* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Sierra Club.

gotten to know each other and enjoyed the support of national leaders, like Executive Director Ben Jealous, who attended this year's Fest at Cedar Lakes Conference Center. We have much to celebrate and more work to do! Many thanks to our members who help make all this happen!



## FILM REVIEW

# Atomic Bamboozle: The False Promise of a Nuclear Renaissance



BY CHRISSEY SANDY

**The Sierra Club Grassroots Network Nuclear Free Team concluded its first Nuclear-free Film Series with the powerful independent film, “Atomic Bamboozle: The False Promise of a Nuclear Renaissance.”**

The film’s focus is Washington state’s Columbia River, lifeblood of the Pacific Northwest. Because of the abundant cool, clear water needed for nuclear power, the Columbia was a prime location for nuclear reactors. Indigenous wintering grounds in Hanford, Washington, now are home for a nuclear disposal site, considered the most contaminated area in the U.S. Atomic Bamboozle also features the nuclear industry’s past and present public relations and propaganda, which promise safety and talk of a need for and security of nuclear power. The nuclear power industry also promises peace, through the creation and use of nuclear weapons as a deterrent for war.

The Sierra Club and grassroot activists have long opposed nuclear power and have fought to close nuclear facilities and keep new ones from being built. Chief among the reasons for this opposition are:

### **COST**

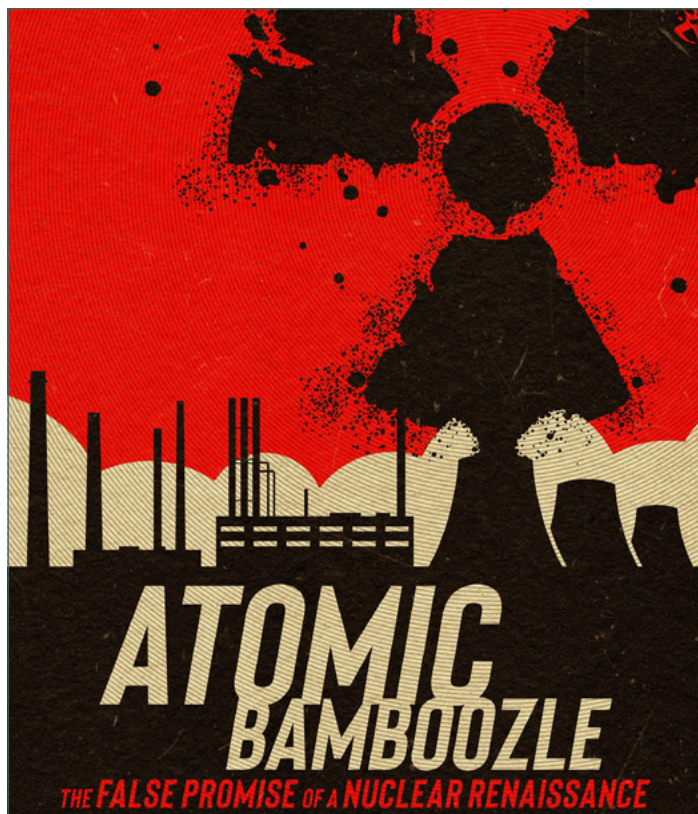
Building nuclear power plants is enormously expensive. The first generation of nuclear power plants proved to be so costly that half of the projects were abandoned during construction. New molten salt reactors (MSR) are even more expensive to build, and their promise of safety is questionable. Billionaire investors, like Bill Gates and his company Terra Power, could fund projects but instead lobby the government for funding.

### **ACCIDENTS**

Think of Three Mile Island, Fukushima, and Chernobyl. These devastating events led to the spread of radioactive contamination lasting generations. Neighbors of these nuclear facilities, including indigenous people, paid the price, not the investors or the companies.

### **WASTE**

All nuclear facilities produce radioactive waste with no clear way of dealing with it. Research shows that new small sodium cooler reactor designs will increase the volume of waste needing management and means of disposal. These reactors use highly corrosive fuels and coolants that become highly radioactive and are even harder to contain than the waste of conventional light-water reactors.



There is no national repository for nuclear waste in the U.S. Although Hanford was designated as a permanent depository, that is off the table, due to the lobbying of tribal nations and the activism of many in the region. Instead, the mission in Hanford is cleanup. Workers at the site are now engaged in the world’s largest environmental cleanup project. The site leaks hundreds of millions of gallons of hazardous liquid waste that has contaminated ground water and the Columbia River. Meanwhile, earthquakes and flooding threaten to bring about even greater spread of toxic contaminants. The remaining cleanup will take thousands of years to complete and cost millions of dollars. It’s the price that must be paid to protect current and future generations from Hanford’s waste.

The history of nuclear power goes back beyond the Manhattan Project. Hanford’s first nuclear plant was a dual reactor, creating both electricity and plutonium. The plutonium created was used to build hundreds of weapons, including those dropped on Hiroshima

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



**WV CHAPTER MEMBERS:**

# VOTE for Chapter and Mon Group Leaders



**BY CANDICE ELLIOTT**

**Ballots to elect new members to Sierra Club West Virginia's Executive Committee (ExComm) will be arriving in members' mailboxes sometime in December.**

Though you may be weary from November's election, all WV Chapter members are nevertheless encouraged to read the candidates' statements, mark their ballots thoughtfully, and return them by the due date indicated on the ballot. Your votes do matter.

Sierra Club ExComms are the primary decision-making bodies for their respective constituencies. They approve policies, appointments, and budgets. The WV Chapter ExComm

consists of seven at-large volunteers elected from among active state members who are willing to serve a two-year term. Four terms, beginning January 2025, are up for reelection.

Likewise, the Monongahela Group — comprising members in Monongalia, Marion, Preston, Harrison, and Taylor counties — will be sending out a ballot. The Mon Group ExComm is led by five volunteer members, one of whom is a voting delegate to the Chapter. Because the group did not hold an election last year, all five seats are up for renewal. The top three vote getters will have two-year terms, the next two will have one-year terms, beginning January 2025.

## Your Votes Do Matter

## ATOMIC BAMBOOZLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

and Nagasaki in 1945, killing 120,000 people immediately. Tens of thousands of others died in the aftermath from radiation poisoning and injuries.

The nuclear power industry is strong, with great public relations. But its promises of safe and abundant energy are a distraction from the urgent need for action on the climate crisis. The environmental movement must focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency. Conservation does not leave a legacy of toxic waste. We must reject false solutions and focus on a path of hope.

To watch Atomic Bamboozle, go to: [vimeo.com/ondemand/atomicbamboozle](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/atomicbamboozle). For more information or to get involved in the Nuclear Free Grassroots team, email [NuclearFreeTeam@gmail.com](mailto:NuclearFreeTeam@gmail.com).

*Editor's Note: During its second special session earlier this year, the WV Legislature passed and Governor Justice signed HB 208, the Radiation Control Act. In addition to giving the WV Department of Health the power to regulate storage and disposal of radioactive materials in the state, it opens the door for out-of-state radioactive waste to be dumped in West Virginia.*



Ensure your environmental legacy by naming Sierra Club or your favorite Sierra Club Chapter in your will or trust. These gifts cost you nothing now. You can hold on to your assets for as long as you need them and you can change your beneficiaries at any time.

*If you have named Sierra Club or your Chapter as a beneficiary or would like to discuss doing so, please contact us today*

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# Outings

FOR MORE DETAILS on each outing,  
and to register online, visit:  
[sierraclub.org/west-virginia/events](http://sierraclub.org/west-virginia/events)



## Saturday, November 23, 2024

**DAY HIKE:** Sweet Run State Park, Neersville, VA

We will hike in Virginia's newest state park. Its 884 acres offer views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, mature forests, meadows, mountainside terrain, and the Sweet Run and Piney Run streams. There are ruins of a 19th-century farming community along with a restored farmhouse built in the 1840s. There is a \$10-per-vehicle entry fee; carpools may be arranged online. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

**Distance:** 5 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATE  
**Duration:** 2.5 hours

## Saturday, December 7, 2024

**DAY HIKE:** Yankauer Nature Preserve,  
Martinsburg, WV

This hike is open to all. It is an easy 2-mile hike on gently rolling hills. We will have some good views of the Potomac River.

**Distance:** 2 miles  
**Difficulty:** EASY  
**Duration:** 1.5 hours



Four Sierrans joined outings leader Tammy Vincent on this hike in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. The group followed the steep White Oak Canyon and Cedar Run Trails, which run along streams nearly the whole way. Cooling waterfalls and cascades rewarded the group for their efforts on a late August day.  
PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.



In September, Sierrans explored the woodlands of Rolling Ridge Retreat Center in Jefferson County.  
PHOTO BY CHRIS CRAIG.

## Sunday, December 15, 2024

**DAY HIKE:** Harpers Ferry Loop through  
Park and Town

We will explore some of the busiest, most popular areas of Harpers Ferry as well as woodland areas few people know about. Some new trails have recently been developed by area volunteers. Winter will allow beautiful views of the Potomac River and the surrounding hills. Our route will take us on pavement, steep rock staircases, and earthen forest trails. It is appropriate for adults and children (accompanied by adults) capable of the distance and a couple of steep hills on uneven terrain. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

**Distance:** 6 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATELY EASY  
**Duration:** 3.5 hours

## Saturday, December 21, 2024

**DAY HIKE:** Murphy/Chambers Farm and  
Virginius Island, Harpers Ferry  
National Historical Park (NHP)

We will hike through fields, wooded ravines, and a riparian forest. We will enjoy views of the Shenandoah River, Civil War cannons, earthworks, and numerous historic sites. This will be a terrific opportunity to see Harpers Ferry decorated for the Christmas season. Harpers Ferry NHP's entry fees are \$20/vehicle or a park pass. Carpooling may be arranged online. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

**Distance:** 6 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATE (with options for a 1.5-mile, EASY alternative)  
**Duration:** 3.5 hours (shorter for easy option)

## Wednesday, January 1, 2025

**DAY HIKE:** C&O Canal Towpath,  
Harpers Ferry, WV

Bring in 2025 in outdoor fashion on our traditional C&O New Year hike. This year we will meet and hike from a parking lot in upper town Harpers Ferry, resulting in one substantial hill to get us from there to the towpath. Walking through the historic town, we will cross the Potomac River on the Byron Bridge and walk round-trip on the towpath from there to the US-340 highway bridge downstream. Winter views of the river and wildlife are often the best. This hike is appropriate for anyone capable of handling the bridge stairs and the half-mile hill. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

**Distance:** 5 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATELY EASY  
**Duration:** 3 hours

## Saturday, January 18, 2025

**DAY HIKE:** South Ridge Trail Loop, Sky  
Meadows State Park,  
Northern Virginia

Sky Meadow State Park is popular at all times of years for its views, wildflowers, and trails great for walking and running. Hiking there in winter will keep the great views but reduce the crowds. Be prepared for some elevation gain (833 ft.) and a mix of woodland and open meadows, which may have cold winter breezes. Well-behaved dogs on leashes are welcome. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

**Distance:** 3 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATE  
**Duration:** 2 hours

## Saturday, January 25, 2025

**DAY HIKE:** Loudon Heights Trail to Split Rock  
overlook, Harpers Ferry NHP

Out-and-back trail hike starting in upper town Harpers Ferry near the Appalachian Trail Visitor Center. After leaving the town we will continue along the Appalachian Trail ending with an overlook of the Potomac River at Split Rock. We will be rewarded with river views of the rocks and rapids along with a view of historic Harpers Ferry. There are approximately 1400 feet of elevation gain. This is a very popular area for birding and hiking.

**Distance:** 7 miles  
**Difficulty:** MODERATE  
**Duration:** 4 hours





Rolling Ridge Retreat Center is a non-profit in Jefferson County that offers its programs and facilities, including an extensive trail network, to organizations and individuals. In September, 13 Sierrans explored five miles of those trails that lie between the Blue Ridge and the Shenandoah River. PHOTO BY ED WHEELLESS.

## Saturday, February 8, 2025

### DAY HIKE: Cool Spring Battlefield, Northern Virginia

This hike will be at the Shenandoah University River Campus at the Cool Spring Battlefield. It is on a paved path around the battlefield with some nice views of the Shenandoah River and the surrounding countryside. There are two loops around the battlefield, so you can do the 2.5-mile option or join us for the entire 5 miles. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 2.5 or 5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATELY EASY
- Duration:** 2.5 hours for full hike

## Saturday, February 15, 2025

### DAY HIKE: Appalachian Trail (AT), Old Forge Picnic Area to Chimney Rocks, Pennsylvania

We will explore another section of the AT in southern Pennsylvania on this winter hike. Our route will take us round trip from the Old Forge picnic area to the popular viewpoint of Chimney Rock, 1,000 feet above. Though the trail is well-maintained and has a reasonable grade, hikers should be prepared for the substantial climb. Wintery conditions could make this hike subject to cancellation, so stay in touch with the trip leader. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 5 miles
- Difficulty:** DIFFICULT
- Duration:** 3 hours

## Saturday, February 22, 2025

### DAY HIKE: Cacapon State Park Central Trail

We will hike from the park Nature Center to the Central trailhead and complete the approximately 5-mile loop. The trail has approximately 750 feet of elevation gain. The total hike miles will be 7.4 approximately. This is a popular trail for birding, hiking, and walking. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 7.5 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE
- Duration:** 3.5 hours



In November, Ken Kendall (center) led a hike for six Sierrans upstream from Hancock, MD on the C&O Canal towpath to Devil's Eyebrow, a geological feature and old lime-quarry site along the Potomac River. PHOTO BY DANA BATEMON.

## Saturday, March 15, 2025

### DAY HIKE: Appalachian Trail (AT), Gapland State Park, MD to Harpers Ferry, WV

This hike will take us from the historic War Correspondent Monument on South Mountain into the town of Harpers Ferry. Along the way, we'll be on a popular stretch of the AT, a section of the C&O Canal towpath, and some town streets and sidewalks. Weverton Cliffs, midway, offers one of the most dramatic views of the Potomac River and the surrounding hills and farms. Though most of the hike will be level or downhill, we will end with a 0.5-mile climb to our meeting spot. Participants must have some experience with a multi-hour hike. This will be a one-way hike involving a carpool shuttle, so reservations are required, and you must be willing to drive or ride with others. There is no charge for this hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 11 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATELY DIFFICULT
- Duration:** 6.5 hours

## Saturday, March 22, 2025

### DAY HIKE: Appalachian Trail (AT), Washington Monument, Boonsboro, MD

This will be an out-and-back hike on the Appalachian Trail in Central Maryland. The hike has about 970 feet of elevation gain from the South Mountain Inn to the Washington Monument for some great views of the area and a little history as well. There is no charge for the hike, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 4 miles
- Difficulty:** MODERATE
- Duration:** 3 hours

## Sunday, March 30, 2025

### DAY HIKE: C&O Canal Towpath, Dargan's Bend to Harpers Ferry

This is an easy bike ride for beginners or anyone ready to start the biking season after the winter. We will be keeping a simple and easy pace. Seasoned bikers are also welcome, but expect a leisurely pace. There will be many spots with history and pretty views of the river. I am hoping bluebells will be in bloom on this date. There is no charge for this ride, but donations are welcome.

- Distance:** 10 miles
- Difficulty:** EASY
- Duration:** 2.5 hours



Chris Craig found relief from the August heat in Shenandoah National Park's White Oak Canyon on a Sierra Club outing. PHOTO BY TAMMY VINCENT.



## Sierra Club

West Virginia Chapter

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Morgantown, WV 26504

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# WINTER 2024



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## Chapter ExComm Meeting

The next meeting of the Executive Committee of the Sierra Club West Virginia Chapter will be **Saturday and Sunday, January 11-12, 2025**, at 414 Tyrone Avery Road in Morgantown. A strategic planning retreat is scheduled, along with social events. Contact [jkotcon@gmail.com](mailto:jkotcon@gmail.com) for details.

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