

### **Coalfield Residents Speak**

Below are some coalfield residents' comments on mountaintop removal / valley fill coal mining (MTR). We have removed the names.

*Along with great original songs, you can hear clips of coalfields residents talking about MTR on the upcoming CD: "Moving Mountains—Appalachian Voices Rise Up." The CD, on the Falling Mountain label, will be released in early 2004. All proceeds will go to support activists working to end mountaintop removal.*

### **Blackwater spills, fear for lives**

My name is XX and I live on the Tug Fork River. As I watch the beautiful green river, it makes me feel so peaceful and relaxed, then all at once the river turns black from a Massey Coal Sludge spill. I am not against coal mining, but we need to deep mine coal and mine responsibly. There is no need to destroy these mountains and streams and our children's future to mine coal.

I fear for my life and my family's life when it rains. I think of ways to run for the hills for my life, from the floods caused by strip mining. I plan to keep my family pictures close to me so that I can save them.

The strip mining is taking everything from us and our children. They will have no future and will never be able to live as true mountaineers as we have and that is part of our children's heritage.

Under this blackened horrible life we are forced to live with, because of irresponsible mining – this has made our state "Almost Hell" – instead of – "Almost Heaven." The people in Logan and Mingo county need to wake up.

Stop Mountaintop Removal and stop valley fill mining--stop filling the headwaters of our streams.

### **Blasting damages**

XX has lived here for 55 years and hadn't had any problems like this:

Mirrored tile fell in bathtub. Had to put up new shower wall.

Water now seeping in basement. Wall cabinet fell – broke all my dishes. (basement).

Had to buy new dishwasher and oven doors wouldn't shut.

Had to have main door repaired. Wouldn't shut enough to lock.

All doors inside house including cabinet doors won't shut good.

Ceiling tile on sunporch falling.

Floor hooved up in living room, dining room and bathroom.

Walls in 3 bedroom bowed out. Tile and mirrored tile in bathroom coming down.

Had to screw paneling back in 3 bedrooms where it came loose.

Counters unlevel now. Furniture stayed. Covered with dust. Pictures wont hang straight now.

All windows have to be screwed shut. Have white shingles on roof, which is now black.

Since '95, I have had 3 heat pumps put in.

Blocks in basement cracked. Can see outside – we put silicone in crack. Several large cracks by meter box outside.

Out building has large cracks – water now coming in cellar

### **Flooding and fear, ruined water**

My name is XX. These are my children, X and X. We are from Bobwhite in Boone County. We are against Mountaintop removal. We are a family that lives in the constant shadow of mountaintop removal, valley fills and slurry ponds. The mining around us has destroyed our quality of life. The blasting from the mines is a constant reminder of why our lives have changed so much. My children are not allowed to play in the water that runs thru our property because the ponds run straight into it. The aquatic life in this stream is all but gone. Catching bait or fishing is a waste of time now there isn't anything there to catch, unless it would be some incurable disease. Who can say that, with the up most certainty this will not endanger my children's health? You, the panel of people who say that what the mine companies are doing is okay. I'm sorry but this has not yet been a trustworthy source.

I have lived on this same property for 35 years of my life. In the same town with the same people, that's all saying the same thing "Mountaintop removal is going to run us out of our homes and off our land like it has so many before us" and I'm beginning to wonder, are they right?

We were flooded in 2001-3 times. With each rainstorm the creek and river fills up more with rocks and debris. In 2002 we were flooded once again. The creek now runs much deeper and faster than it ever has. Then on June 16<sup>th</sup> of 2003 we were flooded horribly. The storm was what the mine company called a one in a hundred year storm. I heard it was an act of God, which is like saying that the buffalo flood was an act of God. I remember when I was a child it rained until I was running in water to my knees in this same yard that is now gone. These catastrophic floods didn't happen then. Why are they happening now? MTR is why. I'm not sure what all the scientific tests tell you, but Common sense tells me that if you pour water onto a rock it's going to roll off, if you pour it into soil it will absorb.

The flood on June 16<sup>th</sup> has ruined our life. The rains came and the hallow coming thru our property rose so fast that we didn't have a chance to react. We were trapped in every direction. The river running by me was still clear and the hallow washing into this river was raging. I was being flooded by a stream that 3 years ago, before the stripping started I could step over. Within 3 hours after it started raining we had lost almost everything. The water coming by me was sent in on mudslides that filled the creek and move the water closer to our house. The mudslide tore thru my barn and thru my orchard of fruit trees. Where there was one of our dogs was tied out. The water and mud came so fast that we couldn't get our dog out. The next morning his collar was lying in the water's new path. As the water and mud continued down it filled a 5 foot culvert that had just recently been put back in from the storms of 2001. From 1981 until 2001 it was 3 foot culvert. It was part of our access. The water washed around the 5ft culvert and took out my septic system, my bridge and all of my drive way and most of my yard. My yard now

drops into a 15 foot crater. It's not safe for my children to play in their own yard. The entire path that this creek took thru our property has been destroyed. There is still more mudslides in this creeks path waiting to come out. The quality of our well water has compromised to say the least. Up until the 16<sup>th</sup> we had good water but now it's terrible. We are now carrying water.

Thank god that the flood water and mud stopped 20 feet short of our house. Our house as of right now is okay. **OUR HOME IS DESTROYED!** The life that we have always known is now non-existent. Hikes thru our own land are now unsafe. We have so many slides and mining breaks. We are of Cherokee nationality and we have always been taught to live off the land. This heritage will no longer be passed down because it is being destroyed with each blast. Everyone that has a hand in allowing this mining practice to continue is allowing WV and its heritage to fade away. We the people of WV are going to pay the ultimate price. We have to live here after the coal is gone. The mine companies don't care to leave us in ruin and leave our people poor. Leaving for us would mean a complete change of lifestyles, something we are not willing to do

As a family we use to love to sit on my front porch and watch a storm come and go. Now it terrifies us to see a storm come. When the rains start everyone gets scared of what going to happen next? If it's raining no one in our house sleeps. My daughter at 9 years old is constantly worried with the mining going on around us. She seen a sticker that said "Coal keeps the lights on" she replied by saying "yeah but the trees keep our air clean. She knows what affect MTR, valley fill and ponds are having on us. Yet the college educated scientist is still looking for the reasons we are all getting flooded so horribly, so often. Hopefully this will open up your eyes and make you see that the community impact of MTR is simply devastation. The rights of people in Baghdad it seems are more important than the rights of the U.S. Citizens. I know our rights to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness are pretty much gone. Thanks to MTR and its practices. If you can sleep with yourselves, I guess we have no choice but to stay up with the storms.

### **Surface mining destroying Whitesville**

I wanted to voice my opinion AGAINST Mountaintop Removal Valley Fill mining. This mining is NOT producing jobs, just the opposite, it is destroying jobs

The town of Whitesville is dying with each new surface mine. The surrounding communities are disappearing from the effects of Mountaintop Removal, the blasting and the flooding. The animals are running from the hills from lack of habitat and are coming down into our homes and yards.

The blasting is destroying people's homes and then we have floods caused by this type of mining. Our children with NOT have a place and our mountain culture and heritage is being destroyed with each mountain.

We are the poorest people and we live in the coal rich counties. Why?

The coal companies DO NOT put anything back of economic development. There is NOT one development site on the 90,000 acres destroyed in the Coal River Valley. The coal field schools are being closed and as a matter of fact – 2 schools were closed this year and both within 1 mile of many Massey Energy mines. Coal is NOT giving anything back.

President Bush should come to these hollows and talk to the people who live with the effects of this mining. The recommendations in this study is pure HOGWASH!!!!!!!!!!

P.S. I live in the coalfields, born and raised.

**Brother left homeless by floods, doesn't find wild things in the mountains anymore**

My name is XX and I live at XX, which is in the Clear Creek Hollow. I am a life time resident of the great state of West Virginia. I was born in 1935 at Edwight, WV and my dad was a retired coal miner. I watched him die of black lung 6 years ago.

When I was a small boy living in the coal camp at Edwight, Whitesville and the surrounding areas there were thousands of coal miners working in the mines, not like today only a few work in the mines.

I have seen the streams run black with coal dust. But not the whole tops of mountains leveled. The sludge dams they have built and the water they have polluted, coal trucks ruining the highways for only a few real jobs? Believe me I am not against jobs.

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When they polluted in the old days at least 10's of 1000's of coal miners had good paying jobs. Then the let down happened; the mines shut down and the coal market dried up, people left the state to find work.

But here we go again big coal companies have found a cheaper way to get the coal. Not like my dad got it, but by removing 1000's of mountaintop acres, filling in the little hollow streams. I used to catch spring lizards for fish bait. We don't find the wild things in the mountains like that any more.

Big coal has bought and paid for pollutions they own and don't give me much of a say so in the matter. They promise me better but big coal uses their money to change the laws to suit them.

I watched the flood waters wash my brothers house killing his animals and leaving him homeless. I saw what happened to Boger Hollar and Sycamore Hollow when the sludge ponds broke. I watched my friends and neighbors cry wondering what to do next. Now what did big coal do? Not our fault; an act of God; It wasn't our fault the dam busted and you cry babies lost everything you had.

In finishing this little letter I'm going to stay here in my little home and I'm going to fight with the big coal for a decent place to live without a polluted environment like we have now and one law maker to go to bat for me.

I guess I'll be fighting for a long time or at least until someone does something to stop this land raping, polluting the water like big coal is doing. Oh yes before I close, the Governor of our State will only be a one-term governor, so if you can stop the raping of my beautiful mountains and stand up to big coal. Please give me your name. I want to stand behind you and support you for governor.

### **Massive ruination**

Mountaintop Removal is Massive Ruination not only to the beautiful Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, but also to every creature whose existence depends on these mountains for their survival, from the streams covered by Valley Fills to the valleys below, where citizens dwell.

It leaves barren lands, valleys filled with debris and polluted streams and airways from Rock dust and Coal dust. It destroys land, citizens' possessions and their health, it leaves slurry impoundments of toxic disposal seeping into our water table.

What once started as an asset to the State of West Virginia has become a liability and the State of West Virginia taxpayers are paying for their damages.

### Hazards of Mountaintop Removal

- Barren Mountains
- Endangered Species
- Endangered Trees
- Flooding
- Toxic Valley Fills
- Air Pollution
- Contaminated Water
- Destruction to Citizens Property
- Blasting Damages
- Health Hazards
- Damaged Highways
- Damages Bridges
- Unsafe Run-off ponds
- Slurry Water Spills
- Dammed up Rivers

### **Psychological scars**

My scars from mountaintop removal have been more psychological than physical.

All my life, I have been free to roam the mountains and valleys near my home. Now, I would be considered a lawbreaker and a trespasser if I were to go back to these places. The first thing a coal company does when it takes a lease it to build a gate, hire security guards (whom they dress as county deputies to intimidate the public), and install cameras to limit access. I consider this to be an infringement of my civil rights.

Sometimes a blast from a nearby mountaintop surface mine will rattle the windows and doors in my house, even to the point of hearing the sheetrock tear from the nails in the ceiling, and if the blasting gets closer the whole house may slip off the props holding it up and slide onto the railroad tracks down below.

And maybe a large boulder from the cliffs up above the house will be dislodged by the blasting and destroy the house.

I have Public Service District water, but I also have a deep well, which I hope will not be harmed by the blasting.

The dust from the big trucks going into the mines are slowly breaking down the truss bridge, which is the community's only outlet to the main highway.

My yard is full of squirrels, rabbits, and bears that have been chased out of the mountains by the blasting of the strip miners and by the logging, which is a precursor to mountaintop removal stripping. The little animals coming out of the mountains are nothing more than skin and bones because their food source has been removed. I love to feed these little animals, but I would like to see the coal companies and logging companies pay part of the feed bill.

I would say that mountaintop removal strip mining has had a severe impact on my life and the life of my community.

### **Coal not worth our health**

I, as a resident and business owner of Mingo Co., think if you build these ponds around residents you should buy us out and relocate us. Don't put people in danger. Coal is not worth our health or our lives. Put in mind first, I'm all for mining coal but do it sage and there won't be no problems after all as a owner of a pizza place, if I don't do it right the people would put me out of operation. So lets do it right and there wont be no problem. And I wouldn't blame them.  
So do it right. That's the only way!

### **Accident waiting to happen**

Coal waste impoundments are an accident just waiting to happen. I base this opinion from past experiences; Buffalo Creek, Logan County, WVa. And Wolf Creek Martin County, KY.

Also I can see no possible way that the people in this valley could be evacuated in case the impoundment fails.

### **Fears of another Buffalo Creek**

I am opposed to the slurry pond impoundment. With all the rain I am afraid it will break and we will have a disaster like Buffalo Creek. I live below the pond, in a valley, and if it breaks there will be no place to go fast enough to reach safety, lives are endangered here, also the more they blast and mine, the worse our water gets – the dust is awful.

### **Blasting cracks**

We have noticed some cracking in our sidewalk. We would be very concerned if a pond was installed in our area. We don't want to see another disaster from this action. A crack in the sidewalk is very minor compared to the disaster a pond would possibly make. We can live with sidewalk cracks, hopefully that's all that will occur.

### **Slurry ponds not necessary**

I am against blasting and the mining underground. If they were to mine we would be forced to move yet again from the area. Slurry ponds are not a necessity around such a rural area. They will cause grief and worry for residents all around Hull Creek as well as Hull Creek Hollow. Also Mountaintop Removal causes sludge to run into streams, creating even more unsafe water for all life, not just humans. We must take care of what we've got, because if we don't do something, some heartless bastard will!

### **Structural damage from blasting**

Structural damage, cracks all in garage floor, crack in blocks and cracks (hair line) all over driveway, one large one, caused by blasting in early morning hours. Value of the property dropped when sludge pond was approved state. We were declared as living in high risk zone. Noise from mine equipment day and night and coal dust damage. Several occupants would prefer to relocate, and would like to be bought out for a fair market price and relocation expenses. New garage, cement and home improvements app. 5 yrs. old.

### **Worrying about kids' safety**

I worry about the safety of my children and grandchildren. I don't think these impoundments can be made safe. The underground mining in the area could affect this impoundment. The mineral rights I own can never be recovered because of the presence of this coal waste impoundment. It has devalued my property. The added truck traffic and trains have made our lives miserable. Our well water quality has been affected as well.

### **Depreciated property values**

Living near a coal waste impoundment, not only depreciate the value of the property for the home owner, or puts ground water supply into question, or anxiety during heavy rain periods, thinking this may break, but it devaluates life itself.

To anyone not living in the coalfields... we are giving up our environment so you may light yours. Please think of us hillbillies, when flipping your light switch.

**Stress of worry**

Having a coal waste impoundment within a quarter mile upstream is a very anxious situation, not to mention the dust and coal truck traffic every day, which is a very unhealthy environment to any one. Just wonder what it is doing to our underground water supply, just to put in words, its like living in exile, it has destroyed our way of life.

**What's in the water**

First you wonder what the coal companies are releasing into the water. If it will make you sick or cause death before your time. If it don't kill you, the next thing you worry about is if this thing burst will you be alive or if everything you work for will be destroyed. You live in a "panic" from one minute to the next and if it rains from 2 or 3 days you get very anxious. I don't think this is any way to live! Next you wonder what these coal company are hiding.

**When will the impoundment fail**

Fear, anxious, panicky, afraid – these are a few words I use to say how I feel about coal waste impoundments. When the TV or radio give a flash flood warning you wonder if you are going to be alive the next minute or not. If it is going to be another Buffalo Creek or Martin County. You wonder what the coal company are releasing from the coal impoundment in the water tables that you are drinking and why are they so secret about these coal impoundments.

**Dust and worry**

My family and I feel threatened by the presence of the impoundment that is constructed at Delbarton Mining Company. When it rains heavy, we worry what could happen if it broke. We are also concerned about how the underground mines will affect the stability of the impoundment. Also, there is more dust in the area, which is hurting people and causing breathing problems.

**Dust and danger**

Blasting shakes my foundation. Coal dust is all over everything. 18 wheelers running overloaded way too fast. Our well water is mined. The slurry pond is too dangerous for all of us that live here in this area. So many of the ponds break for different reasons. Don't want to be one of the ones to get washed away.

**Secretive coal company**

The fact that no one let me or my family know about the sludge pond at the mine site really upsets me. It's a scary thing to think that it could break and wash us away like other sludge ponds has done in other places and to see this in newspapers and on TV. I would really hate for this to happen in my neighborhood. I have two children I try hard to protect. I can't protect them from this!