

## Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline: Goodbye Trees, Hello Dangerous Landslide

by Alex Cole

Above: Hogs Back Mountain, Sulug Road, on the Sulug Branch of 18 Mile Creek in northeast Putnam County, WV.

It is a place. It was a home.

This is a glaring example of hubris catching up in a big way with TransCanada–Columbia Gas Transmission along the route of its 170-mile-long, 36-inch-diameter Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline.

Driving around on a Sunday in early February, I saw dozens of slips just in my little section of the pipeline in Putnam County, but this was definitely the worst. It makes me wonder how many there are in total between Wayne County and Moundsville.

You just can't take the trees off of the landscape here and expect the ground to stay put. I can't help but think this is what it looks like when some

engineer in an office somewhere draws a line on a map without ever stepping foot on the ground and seeing the place firsthand.

According to people I talked with in the area, they warned crews that the mountain was unstable when they began cutting trees. Since then, this is just the latest in a series of slips at the location. Crews have had to move the pipeline itself twice since it was initially put in the ground. Now, it is at the far limit of the right-of-way and still the slip is threatening to undercut it.

Henkels and McCoy, the Pennsylvania-based company building this section of pipeline, had to hire a special crew of local heavy equipment operators with experience in this terrain to try to stop this slip from getting worse, but to no avail.

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**Inside This *Winds of Change***

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On the windy eve of the fifth anniversary of the MCHM water crisis, clean-water advocates gather at the Kanawha River for a candlelight vigil.

# Water is Sacred

by Janet Keating

“Water: A Sacred Gift, A Human Right, and Our Stewardship Role” was the title of a January 8 public forum hosted by OVEC, Creation Justice Ministries, and other groups.

This was the eve of the 5th anniversary of the West Virginia water crisis, during which more than 300,000 of the state’s residents were without tap water after a toxic coal-cleaning chemical seeped into the public water system from a rusted above-ground storage tank.

The forum’s aim was to connect with people of faith and others to not only remember the valuable lessons of that ill-fated day, but also to reflect upon the sacredness of water and our stewardship responsibilities in safeguarding water. We also sought to inform attendees about current and new threats to this life-sustaining resource.

Thanks to Reverend Randolph Richardson and the congregation of the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church for providing our venue. The reverend welcomed everyone (50 to 70 participants at any one time), gave an opening prayer, and then spoke briefly about how the water crisis had affected Trinity’s Table, a program that serves a hot, balanced meal every Sunday to anyone who comes through their doors.

I spoke, as a representative of CJM, on our Christian faith and water—the significance of water on earth and in scriptures. Folks were reminded that many Christian social principles lift up, as a matter of justice, the importance of providing access to clean, safe water for the “the least of these.” Jesus said in Matthew 10:42 “And whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”

OVEC board member (at the time) Reverend Rose Edington and her husband Reverend Mel Hoover, recalled the leadership their congregation took on during the water crisis: hosting meetings, raising funds for water, marching with activists, and testifying at public hearings. Religious leaders and citizens relentlessly demanded, and were successful in the passage of, a strong aboveground storage tank bill.

Father Brian O’Donnell, speaking for the West Virginia Council of Churches, reflected on their annual public policy booklet, given to each legislator, which outlines the WVCC’s stances on issues facing West Virginians, including water. Thankfully, WVCC is engaged throughout the 60-day West Virginia Legislative Session.

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# Stockman OVEC's New ED

At its first meeting of 2019, the OVEC Board of Directors elected Vivian Stockman to serve as our new executive director. She had been appointed as interim ED since December 2018, after the resignation of Natalie Thompson, who held the ED position for two years.

Vivian first started with OVEC in 1995, as a volunteer working on OVEC's successful Stop the Pulp Mill campaign. OVEC hired her as part-time staff in 1998. By 2000, she was working full-time as our communications and media specialist. Her photographs of mountaintop removal coal mining, both on-the-ground and aerial—thank you SouthWings!—helped build the awareness that grew into the ongoing movement to end mountaintop removal.

She says, "I couldn't take on the responsibilities of ED without the support of OVEC's staff. We really do work as a team. But what underlies the success of our team, and what truly enables my ability to take on the ED role, are the folks who volunteer for all kinds of activities. Volunteers serve on our board of directors, sample streams, edit our newsletter, write for our blog, write letters-to-the-editor, participate in events, and much more. They are the lifeblood of OVEC's successes."

Vivian says she is also grateful to have the advice of Janet Keating, who, after 24 years at OVEC, retired from the ED position in 2016.

Janet says, "Vivian is the ideal person to lead OVEC. She has not only the personal leadership qualities and skills it takes to build and guide a successful team of staff and volunteers, but she also has the experience and depth of knowledge of the important issues in our state and region.

"For years she has built and maintains significant relationships with members, volunteers, leaders from other allied organizations, and donors. Her greatest strength is the depth of her commitment to social and environmental justice for the people and environment in our state and region. How fortunate OVEC is to have Vivian at the helm!" 🍓



Vivian on a SouthWings photography flyover of mountaintop removal sites. Photo: Chuck Wyrstok.

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All photos here by V. Stockman, unless otherwise noted.  
Graphics from assorted sources.

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OVEC is a coalition member of the WV Environmental Council and The Alliance for Appalachia, and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered with the IRS and the West Virginia Secretary of State.

## #GivingTuesday-Funded Billboards Going Up



Thanks so much to everyone who donated back in November for #GivingTuesday! Thanks to your generosity and the support of the 11th Hour Foundation, we have been able to purchase billboards with the above graphic for placement in and around Huntington, WV.

The aim of the billboards is to help build awareness of and opposition to ASH, the Appalachian Storage Hub, a proposed massive petrochemical corridor. Read more about this monstrosity on pages 4, 5, 18, and 19. 🍓

# I Want Better For The Ohio River Valley



Above: A Shell cracker plant under construction along the Ohio River near Beaver, PA. This huge industrial facility is one of five or more such plants that would be part of the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub.

This March 12, 2019 photo is courtesy of Ted Auch PhD, Great Lakes Program Coordinator, FracTracker Alliance, [fractracker.org/photos](http://fractracker.org/photos).

by Bev Reed

I live in Bridgeport, OH, in the house I have lived in my entire life, situated above a bicycle shop. My parents first opened the bicycle shop in 1973, partly because of the oil crisis in the Middle East. There seemed to be a need for humans to decrease their dependence on oil, so my parents decided to fill that need in the Ohio River Valley. I have been blessed to play a part in helping people travel by bike in this area, which has a strong history of fossil fuel extraction.

According to the November 2018 edition of Ohio Gas and Oil magazine, there are 593 horizontal drilling sites in various stages in Belmont County. This number is expected to increase if the PTT Global ethane cracker plant is built. Experts predict there would need to be about 1,000 new wells drilled each year in the area in order to feed the plant. This would directly affect me in multiple ways.

*This excerpt from a blog post by Bev Reed can be read in full at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org). Bev, of Belmont County, OH, is one of many local folks stepping up to defend what they love from infrastructure that would become part of the proposed Appalachian Petrochemical Hub. Sign Bev's petition regarding the PTT Global ethane cracker: [bit.ly/2RY6PRv](http://bit.ly/2RY6PRv).*

My family also owns a 60-acre farm in Belmont County. The industry is planning to drill a new well pad directly across from our front door. I have spent countless days and nights walking and playing in the creek bed, hiking the fields, digging in the dirt, and simply enjoying the peaceful stillness, beautiful serene landscape, and clean air at our farm. It's hard to contemplate what this drilling site would turn all of that into. I imagine the noise, light, and chemical pollution that would be generated by the fracking activity.

The increased frack pad production would cause an increase in residual waste truck traffic throughout the area. We recently had a bike shop customer, who happened to be an industry worker in the past, tell us his co-worker has cancer. She drove a fracking truck. He said he quit his job because the company wanted him to sign a contract stating that he would not sue them if he got cancer. According to Lea Harper of FreshWater Accountability Project, frack waste trucks contain radioactive material.

I ride my bike on the rolling hills of this valley and have probably been exposed to this material. Radioactive toxins can't be seen, heard or smelled; they can be deadly but you have no way of detecting them unless you carry a Geiger counter.



Another view of the Shell cracker plant under construction along the Ohio River near Beaver, PA. This March 12, 2019 photo is courtesy of Ted Auch PhD, Great Lakes Program Coordinator, FracTracker Alliance, [fractracker.org/photos](http://fractracker.org/photos).

The frack trucks also create hazards on the road. Drivers go extremely fast on rural roads and aren't always fond of cyclists. Throughout my canvassing for the EPA permit hearings in Moundsville, WV, I've heard multiple complaints about the traffic that is already heavy and burdensome in the area. I am definitely not alone when it comes to concerns about traffic, as residents in Moundsville are concerned about the increased traffic they would face with the construction and operations of the cracker plant.

I am a youth mountain bike coach and one of the parks that our team practices in is GrandVue Park, in Moundsville, WV. This park is on a hilltop, directly above the location of the proposed cracker plant. I'm not sure how "grand" the view would be from the park if the plant goes in. The plant would be legally emitting many chemicals into the air and water, and this would affect the entire area in which we live, work, and recreate. 🍷

## We Demand A Say!

*In the United States, the front of the plastics boom runs along the Gulf Coast from Texas to Louisiana, and through the upper Ohio River Valley, which spans Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. It's made up of small communities that often had little say in their role in the new infrastructure build-out, with decisions made largely behind the scenes by politicians and corporate behemoths.*

- Zoë Carpenter, in "The Toxic Consequences of America's Plastics Boom," printed in the April 1, 2019 edition of The Nation.



Above: Dustin White, in a parrot suit, makes Polly's point outside a hearing about a permit for the PTT Global ethane cracker plant. Cracker plants are not good for exotic birds and other living things. Don't worry, Dustin did exit the parrot suit and make comments at the hearing.

Photo by Randi Pokladnik.

You don't have to wear a parrot suit (if you want, you toucan), but we do need you to help raise opposition to the proposed petrochemical buildout of our region. Want to help? Contact OVEC at [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org) or 304-522-0246.

# Eggs and Policy are Fuel for Democracy



*In OVEC's office, members of the League of Women Voters, OVEC's Robin Blakeman and Delegate Chad Lovejoy, during WVCCE's policy breakfast.*

On December 12, OVEC hosted an 8 a.m. breakfast meeting (left) for Cabell County legislators, along with the League of Women Voters Huntington and WV Citizens for Clean Elections, a group we co-founded and help lead.

Our aim was to discuss our groups' legislative priorities for the upcoming 2019 Legislative Session. Topics we discussed over eggs, English muffins, and coffee included the need to thwart the proposed Appalachian Storage Hub and instead promote a cleaner, greener vision for West Virginia's future, human health criteria for setting water quality standards, solar PPAs-Purchase Power Agreements, and the Pro-Democracy Anti-Corruption Platform.

To learn more about that platform, head over to [wvoter-owned.org](http://wvoter-owned.org). You'll find links to actions and details to get you up to speed on our #WVProDemocracy work. 🍳

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## Restore Honor and Integrity to the Court

*A version of this op-ed by Julie Archer and Vivian Stockman appeared in the February 23 Charleston Gazette-Mail. Julie and Vivian are leaders of WV Citizens for Clean Elections, a coalition working to increase transparency and accountability in West Virginia elections, and ensure that our courts are fair and impartial.*

On Valentine's Day, news broke that former state Supreme Court Justice Allen Loughry will spend two years in prison for using his position on the Court for personal gain, actions which came to light as reporters looked into lavish spending on renovations at the Court, and Loughry sought to shirk responsibility and shift blame by going to federal prosecutors.

The news coverage exposed what would become a scandal involving all five Supreme Court judges. Impeachment proceedings began, some resignations ensued, and that set the stage for the governor to make two highly partisan appointments to fill vacancies on the Court.

The scandal underscores how essential transparency and accountability are in maintaining trust in the Court. For the governor and Legislature, the scandal provides an ongoing opportunity to implement reforms to improve the integrity of and restore confidence in the Court. Or not.

Actions taken so far this Legislative Session could

actually erode the separation of powers between the legislative and judicial branches of government. These actions could undermine the independence of the judiciary, and—after the impeachments and partisan appointments of last year—provide more opportunities to pack the courts with partisan allies.

For instance, there's Senate Bill 266, which would establish an intermediate court of appeals (ICA) for the State. Governor Jim Justice says this legislation would "restore honor and integrity" to the courts. Instead, this bill would create the first bench of unelected judges in the history of WV, and it would allow Justice to appoint all the members of the ICA—a court-packing scheme with serious implications for any families, students, or businesses seeking justice in the courts!

Why are the governor and the Legislature proposing to take the power of the vote away from West Virginians? How could our elected leaders think that appointing judges through a process that is not

transparent will help restore trust in the courts?

Perhaps even more worrying, the House Judiciary Committee approved and amended Senate Bill 398, which deals with payment to senior status judges. An amendment includes punitive measures on judicial

retirement accounts unless the Court reverses a specific decision that the Legislature disagrees with. This sets a dangerous precedent, and is an example of the type of politically motivated attacks against state courts that are on the rise around the country.

Rather than attacking and packing the courts, the Legislature and Court should double-down on implementing reforms to promote a fair and impartial judiciary and improve confidence in both the judicial system and the electoral process.

The Court did adopt some new accountability standards focused on addressing the practices that got them in trouble last year, but much remains to be done.

Two reforms that could go a long way toward restoring public trust in the judiciary focus on the secret special-interest money that is pouring into judicial campaigns. The Legislature must pass disclosure and transparency laws that show the public who is trying to influence its votes. And it is way past time for the Court itself to adopt an objective recusal standard to remove conflicts of interest from our courts, so that judges who take money from someone can't preside over their case.

Ten years have passed since the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Caperton v. Massey*, wherein the nation's highest court ruled against then-WV Supreme Court Justice Brent Benjamin after he refused to recuse himself from a case boasting a \$50 million conflict of interest.

In that case, former U.S. Solicitor General



Theodore B. Olson wrote, “The improper appearance created by money in judicial elections is one of the most important issues facing our judicial system today. A line needs to be drawn somewhere to prevent a judge from hearing cases involving a person who has

made massive campaign contributions to benefit the judge. We certainly believe that, in this case, acting Chief Justice Benjamin crossed that line.”

If our elected officials are really intent on restoring honor and integrity to the courts—as they should be—then they need to uphold our tradition of electing judges, encourage high voter turnout, and demand accountability of our elected officials. Ways they can do this include:

- Strengthening disclosure of the secret special-interest money flooding our judicial elections.
- Funding our judicial public financing program/system so that candidates for the Supreme Court don't have to take money from parties who might later have cases before the Court.
- Making the current process of filling judicial vacancies more transparent.

These are a few of the points enumerated in West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections' (WVCCE) Pro-Democracy Anti-Corruption Platform, which aims to increase accountability and transparency in WV, make voting more accessible to all citizens, limit the influence of big-money in politics, ensure fairness and impartiality in our courts, and increase citizen participation in the electoral process.

*Update: Thankfully SB 266 died during the 2019 Legislative Session. SB 398 passed, but minus the punitive measures, so that turned out okay. SB 622 is a whole 'nuther matter though... See that story on page 14.* 🍓

# Doc Knocks Down the House

In 2016, OVEC member Paula Swearengin was one of many women nationwide who ran for office. Four of those women's political campaigns are chronicled in *Knock Down the House*, a documentary that drew rave reviews at this year's prestigious Sundance Film Festival.



A promotional graphic for the documentary includes Paula Swearengin, top left. Graphic from online sources.

You guessed it: Paula is one of the women featured in this documentary, directed by Rachel Lears.

Rachel, Paula, and the three other women in the film: Las Vegas candidate Amy Vilela, St. Louis candidate Cori Bush, and New York candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the only one of the four who won her campaign. After the film screened at Sundance, the women appeared on stage (Ocasio-Cortez via Skype) to a standing ovation.

The youngest-ever House of Representatives member told the crowd, "I think overall, we need to realize that our democracy does belong to *us*, and when we don't participate in it, when we don't invest in it, when we don't put our own energy into it, what we are doing is we are giving it away to somebody else, and we give it away usually to a very small group of people."

Of course, Paula exemplifies that in her actions, and those are captured in this documentary. Paula gets out the word about mountaintop removal coal mining and so many other issues facing the great state of West Virginia, including the issue of special-interest money in politics.

The director told one news outlet, "The whole idea of the political project behind this, that I want people to come away with, is hope on the one hand—and to cut through cynicism. But also the whole intrinsic relationship between money and politics, and representation and politics. When campaigns are expected to cost millions of dollars, and candidates are expected to have personal access to millions of dollars in order to be viable, we are going to only have certain kinds of people running for office. We hope that's one of the structural things that comes across in the film, alongside the very human, dramatic stories of the main characters."

You also guessed it again: We will work to help get *Knock Down the House* to West Virginia. Thank you, Paula, for all you did in the campaign and thank you to director Rachel Lears for this inspiring film! 🍷

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## More Movies to Move You to Action



We hope to see you at an upcoming community movie night, which the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Huntington and OVEC first co-hosted on January 11.

That night, about 40 people gathered for our screening of *UNFRACTURED*. This documentary tells the story of Sandra Steingraber, and others in New York State, who literally put their bodies on the line to oppose unconventional oil and gas developments in their state. They won a ban on fracking in New York, but it wasn't easy. Following the film, there was a lively discussion about both the content of the film and the adverse effects of oil and gas development in West Virginia.

This film night was so well received that we are

planning to collaborate with the church community again to show two more films. At least two will have already been screened by the time you get this newsletter: On February 22, we screened *In the Hills and Hollows*. Then on March 8, we showed *The Devil We Know*. Type these titles into a search engine to find and watch trailers. Also please be sure you are on our action alert list so you receive notifications of events like this in a timely manner; e-mail [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org) with "join action alert list" in the subject line, or sign up at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org).

The films screen at the church, 701 5th Avenue, Huntington WV, 25701. There's no admission charge. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. with snacks available at the church; the films begin at 7 p.m. 🍷



# ORSANCO Pollution Control Standards Update

by Robin Blakeman

What's up with the Ohio River Pollution Control Standards?

That's a question that has been plaguing OVEC volunteer Randi Pokladnik and me. That's why we went to Cincinnati, OH, for the February 12 to 14 ORSANCO Technical Committee and Commission meetings. We met up with representatives from many of our allied environmental groups in the Ohio River region.

The meeting provided us some answers and a new pollution control standards proposal. The crowd at the meeting overwhelmingly wanted more protection from pollution, not less.

Many representatives from the allied groups gave public comments to the commission relating their extreme concern over any decrease in Pollution Control Standards and their hope that these standards will actually be increased in the near future.

The nutshell outcome of the commission meetings is that there are still serious concerns about pollution in the main-stem of the Ohio River; thus, the ORSANCO Commission has reinforced their commitment to maintaining the usage criteria for water quality in the Ohio River, and we have a new proposal from the ORSANCO Commission to consider and comment on regarding their Pollution Control Standards (PCS).

In essence, this new proposal retains the current ORSANCO Pollution Control Standards but allows



the member states in the ORSANCO Compact to use alternative PCS criteria in their permitting processes, as long as the designated “uses”—as defined in the ORSANCO Compact—of the river are maintained.

New language was added to require state permit writers to submit their permit information to ORSANCO staff for review, prior to full approval of those permits. Under the new proposal, these reviews will be key in terms of potential challenges to states issuing permits that could result in pollution discharges that could impair the Ohio and render the water unusable in a certain place for recreation, a tap-water source, industrial uses, and biological/aquatic life forms (this is a summary of the designated uses that ORSANCO maintains).

As we went to press, a 45-day public comment period, with three public hearings, was underway, ending April 15. If you have questions and/or want to get involved in this work, please contact me at [robin@ohvec.org](mailto:robin@ohvec.org) or 304-522-0246. 🍌

## Light Surge



WV Interfaith Power and Light (WVIPL) is expanding its reach.

We now have a steering committee member from the Shepherdstown (Eastern Panhandle) area and have had a request for more information about our programs from a ministerial association in Fairmont.

Our programs this year include ongoing energy-efficient light

bulb collections, a postcard writing campaign on the RECLAIM Act, and a statewide tree planting campaign, which we will kick off this spring.

We would be glad to come to any community to discuss these programs and to bring information about the larger national programs of Interfaith Power and Light, which now include focus groups on pipelines and oil and gas infrastructure, as well as previous resources on conducting “Carbon Fasts” and much more.

OVEC helped initiate WVIPL, and OVEC's Robin Blakeman serves on its steering committee. For more information on WVIPL, contact her at [robin@ohvec.org](mailto:robin@ohvec.org) or 304-522-0246. 🍌

# MXP, Landslide

*continued from page 1*

What you are looking at in these pictures is its state *after* months of mitigation efforts, and there has been litigation, too. At the beginning of the project, Columbia Gas Transmission tried to buy out the people living in these two trailers. Initially they refused; they did not want to move.

After the slips got worse and threatened their safety, the homeowners reluctantly evacuated. According to neighbors, the company was able to settle with them out of court, and they bought a nearby farm with a new doublewide already on it. Columbia gas now owns all the property you see here, with the exception of the county road right-of-way.

This most recent massive landslide happened on December 28 last year, while the company's environmental inspector was on holiday break. It was his job to notify the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) of any slips that result in the off right-of-way migration of material that impacts protected resources, public roads, residential properties, etc.

This slip checks all those boxes, but FERC was not notified until January 7. By the time they got to the scene on January 8, workers had already cleared the road, the yard, installed sediment barriers, and driven piles above and below the road to keep it clear. In official reports, the FERC inspector said there "was no indication that the slip reached the waterway," though I seriously question his ability to judge that based on the fact that crews had over a week to clean up and cover up the mess. Although this is a clear violation of protocol, FERC did not take any punitive actions at that time aside from a verbal reprimand of the company's lead environmental investigator for late reporting.

The company is apparently paying Putnam County deputies in their patrol cars (presumably off duty?) to guard the area even on Sundays and the road is closed to through traffic; still, dozens of people who live on Sulug Road have to drive through the slipping area daily to get to and from work.

Columbia Gas has already pressure tested the pipeline in this area and FERC has granted permission to put the majority of the MXP into service. It is unclear to me if this section was included in any of these permissions, but I know I will never trust this part of the line.



I fervently hope it is never so, but if I ever hear about a pipeline explosion in Putnam County, I will look to Hog's Back Mountain on Sulug Road. I live about 10 miles away as the crow flies; odds are I'll be able to see it from here. 🍷

## More MXP Landslides

As part of its obligation to FERC—the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission—Columbia Gas Transmission is required to submit reports on its own "Environmental Compliance Monitoring Program" during construction of its 170-mile Mountaineer Xpress Pipeline.

These reports document that during construction there have so far been 260 company-documented slips—landslides of assorted sizes. 102 of these slips extended outside the pipeline's right-of-way (from 75 to 150 feet wide, depending on the stage of construction and the terrain through which the pipeline is passing, such as wetlands or farmland), meaning that additional land had to be "acquired" so the pipeline contractors could attempt cleanup and stabilization of the land. In several cases, the landowners where these slips occurred are being represented by lawyers in their interactions with Columbia Gas and its parent company TransCanada.

The slips are already troubling for what they mean in terms of property rights, property safety, the stability of the hills where the pipeline lays, and potential stream sedimentation. They are downright frightening when you recall that the June 7 rupture and massive explosion of TransCanada's Leach Xpress Pipeline near Moundsville, WV, was attributed to a landslide. The Leach Xpress had only been in operation a week when the blast took place, thankfully in a forested rather than inhabited area.

# FOIA?



In late January, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) advanced a proposal to restrict Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from the public. This is a clear attempt to benefit dirty energy and anti-public lands industry lobbyists and their allies seeking to extract policy changes from the Trump administration.

Thanks to Earthjustice for the heads up on DOI's move, OVEC helped spread the word among our allies. Citizen groups large and small from across the nation banded together to comment on the proposed rule change. More than 100 groups signed a letter opposing the effort.

Before submitting the comments, the groups asked for an extension to the public comment period. The DOI granted an extension of *one day*, despite the partial government shutdown that was taking place during the comment period. That move speaks volumes about this administration's regard for public input!

Acting DOI head and barely-former oil lobbyist David Bernhardt and former Koch (Brothers) Foundation strategist Daniel Jorjani, quietly advanced this keep-out-the-public plan while tens of thousands of department employees nationwide worked without pay during the government shutdown.

For decades, citizens' Freedom of Information Act—FOIAs—requests have been central to all kinds of work to hold government accountable. As Earthjustice notes, recent examples include the use of FOIAs in identifying the rampant misuse of taxpayer dollars under former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and former DOI Secretary Ryan Zinke.

The attempt to restrict FOIAs by the fossil fuel lobbyists who are currently in charge at DOI is odiously antidemocratic. Stay tuned! 🍌



**Don't Let Them Pull the Rockwool Over Your Eyes**

In February, the Huntington Regional Chamber of Commerce issued a disturbing statement saying it would host a luncheon for Rockwool Ranson.

The statement quoted Dr. Bill Bissett, president and CEO of the chamber as saying, "I appreciate Rockwool's steadfast commitment as a West Virginia business, and I think that we can learn from their experience about how to comply with the law, even in the face of emotionally charged opposition, to grow jobs in Cabell and Wayne Counties. If West Virginia is truly going to be open for new business, we have to welcome companies like Rockwool and find other companies like them that want to call West Virginia home."

We knew we couldn't sit idly by, and we quickly contacted former OVEC board member Regina Hendrix, who had been keeping us apprised of the Rockwool controversy in the Eastern Panhandle. The Denmark-based Rockwool is in the process of building a factory there, and Regina has been a leader of a group of concerned citizens who have been working tirelessly for months to stop it.

Regina penned a January 19 op-ed published in the Charleston Gazette-Mail in which she said that she wanted the West Virginia Development Office to stop "going to the European Union and accepting projects that are too toxic to be located in Europe. Our legislators must put a stop to this sneaking, dirty, polluting deal. No more European garbage for West Virginians."

Regina and OVEC put out the word to alert folks about Rockwool's visit here, and we soon had commitments from members of the Women's March WV Huntington Chapter, and Tri-State Indivisible-WV-OH-KY to join us outside the luncheon to make

*continued on page 15*

# Thank Goodness *Some* Congressional Reps Care!

We once again extend our thanks to Congressman Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ) for caring more about what mountaintop removal coal mining is doing to Appalachians than do Appalachia's coal-bought politicians.

On February 11, as House Natural Resources Chairman, Grijalva, along with Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee Chairman Alan Lowenthal (D-CA), requested that acting Department of Interior Secretary (and barely-ex oil industry lobbyist) David Bernhardt explain why that agency canceled a survey of studies linking mountaintop-removal coal mining to disease.

Grijalva and Lowenthal want to see all internal documents regarding the cancellation, the fate of the more than a half million dollars in unspent funds, and documentation about meetings between DOI officials and coal industry groups.

Back in 2017, Grijalva came to Appalachia to see mountaintop removal firsthand and to meet with representatives of various groups, including OVEC.

According to a February 12 news article by E&E News reporter Dylan Brown:

Grijalva and others asked for the same records last year after an Interior inspector general report undercut the department's official rationale for axing a National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine review.



Mountaintop removal looms over a Raleigh County, WV community.  
Photo by V.S. Flyover courtesy SouthWings.

President Obama had commissioned a two-year, \$1 million analysis of existing research on human health impacts from the intensive strip-mining technique, most common in Appalachia.

But former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke halted it after a year, citing a department review of grants and cooperative partnerships of more than \$100,000.

The IG report found no evidence of such a review, and the National Academies noted that the mountaintop-removal study was the only one of eight projects meeting the criteria to be canceled.

(Note, relevant due to the swamp-corruption-factor: Zinke resigned from the top spot at DOI

amid ethics investigations. Just weeks later he was joining a D.C. lobbying firm to lobby Congress.)

Two years ago, Brown, the reporter, also came to West Virginia to learn more about mountaintop removal. He met with several OVEC members and staff while here.

In announcing its latest request to DOI on its Facebook page, the House Natural Resources Committee wrote, "We need to know if the Trump administration is lying to the American people to protect the coal industry at our expense." 🍌



## **OVEC WORKS!**

*Thanks to everyone near and far for taking action to end environmental injustice, with an extra special thanks to all the folks fighting extreme fossil fuel extraction. We know it takes courage to speak up! We hope you know how much we appreciate you. OVEC works because of you!*

## **THANKS!**

# Human Rights Sacrificed to Coal Company Greed

Late last year, OVEC's Dustin White gave a mountaintop removal tour to representatives of Human Rights Watch (HRW), and he helped connect them with people living near MTR operations.

On December 10, Human Rights Day, HRW released a report based on their visit here and loads of research: "The Coal Mine Next Door: How the U.S. Government's Deregulation of Mountaintop Removal Threatens Public Health." (Type that title into a search engine to find the report and accompanying video. Or, come and read the report in our office.)

The must-read report notes:

*The disregard for public health risks in Congress' decision to cancel the Stream Protection Rule and the Interior Department's decision to halt the NAS study exemplifies the problem with carrying out deregulation with industry's interests as the primary consideration. With no proper assessment of a rule change or rollback's health risks, Americans, especially the tens of millions of people who rely on private wells, are left vulnerable to paying the price with their health.*

The report makes several recommendations, including this one to the Department of Interior:

*Enact a new rule that protects people living near mountaintop removal from health risks and other adverse impacts, including protecting their water and air quality. Ban the practice entirely if no other regulatory approach offers adequate protection from serious harm.*

HRW's Sarah Saadoun, the author of the report, says, "For me the bigger question is not whether we should be mining coal or surface mining at all. The question is how we make these decisions as a society. Are we considering all the evidence and all the costs that are borne by the people who live around these mines?"

Sadly, we doubt the Trump Administration has given the report even the side-eye. Reporters noticed, though, and Dustin also spoke with a couple who covered it. For instance, search for "A toxic crisis in America's coal country," by Gareth Evans with the

BBC.

Sydney Boles, with the Ohio Valley ReSource, also covered the story. In her article "Digging For Answers: New Report Points To Industry Obfuscation Of Mining's Health Effects," she writes that:

*Peer-reviewed studies have shown that mountaintop removal mining increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, birth defects and other health conditions for people living near mine sites. Perhaps the most prolific researcher into these health risks is Environmental Health*

*Professor Michael Hendryx, formerly of West Virginia University and now at Indiana University.*

*"I've become convinced over time, after we've done all these studies, that mountaintop removal is harmful to health, and we have evidence both from the health and the environmental side to*

*support that statement," Hendryx said.*

*Human Rights Watch's Saadoun argued in her report that industry interests played a role in suppressing attempts to clarify the science around health risks and shifted the burden of dealing with those health risks onto vulnerable communities. Saadoun found that the mining industry had a role in the 2017 repeal of the Stream Protection Rule, an Obama-era regulation that would have blocked surface mining within 100 feet of a stream.*

*"The coal industry spent millions of dollars lobbying legislators to oppose this rule and contributed generously to campaigns of several lawmakers who would ultimately vote to cancel it," Saadoun wrote.*

*When Congress was considering the repeal, Saadoun said in an interview, lawmakers relied on industry-commissioned research that overestimated the economic cost the rule would have.*

All this points to more reasons to get involved in our Clean Elections work; see pages 6 and 7. 🍓



**Stay up to date on  
the latest events.  
Check our online calendar  
at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org).**



# SB 622: We Got What We *Don't* Want: *More Money, Less Transparency in Politics*

*What do we want? Democracy! When do we want it? Now!*

But many members of the WV Legislature couldn't care less what we, the people, want. That is evidenced by the passage of SB 622, **a bill that allows even more big money into a system that already favors the wealthy and special interests.**

Despite the way practically every West Virginia voter—Republican or Democrat—feels about the state of our politics and money's role in it, West Virginia politicians passed SB 622, the bill no one asked for. No one except wealthy special interests, of course.

They passed the bill late at night, right before the 2019 Legislative Session came to a close. SB 622 increases campaign contribution limits from \$1,000 to \$2,800 for candidates, to \$5,000 for Political Action Committees (PACs), and to \$10,000 per year for party committees.

Most West Virginians can't afford to give \$1,000 to their favorite candidates, let alone the new, nearly tripled upper limit of \$2,800, so it's worth asking: who wants these higher limits?

That is simple enough to answer: on one hand, politicians who would rather attend ritzy behind-closed-doors big-money fundraisers than actually knock on doors and raise money from regular West Virginians. The other big beneficiary: the wealthiest few and big-money special interests.

Those same West Virginians who can't afford to donate big bucks should at least be able to know who is trying to use big-money donations to influence politicians and their votes. To that end, Delegate Chad Lovejoy (D-Cabell) proposed an amendment to SB 622 that would have brought disclosure to independent expenditure groups ("dark money" groups) that give more than \$10,000.

Republican members of both the Senate

and House Judiciary Committees shot down the amendment.

"West Virginia citizens have a right to know who's paying for the ads they're being bombarded with," Lovejoy told The Parthenon, Marshall University's student newspaper.

The paper reported:

*Lovejoy said he has knocked on thousands of doors and talked to thousands of West Virginians, and none of them have ever advocated for more money and less transparency in politics.*

*"Not one constituent of mine has ever said that," he said...*

*"We crammed this bill through the session under the dark of night in hopes the media and citizens wouldn't pick up on it while we engage in lawmaking counterproductive to democracy," Lovejoy said.*

Unbelievably, the opposition to the dark money transparency amendment claimed it would have hurt the free speech of a hypothetically oppressed donor who gives

more than \$10,000 to a 501(c)4 dark-money group. There may be a place for real concern about political retribution and the need to protect free speech rights, but it most certainly does not apply to the elite individuals who are already able to give more than \$10,000 in a single election cycle.

Which brings us to another question: Why do we have contribution limits anyway? To prevent corruption and ensure equality of political voice. You don't have to go too far to see why million-dollar campaign donations can lead to nearly direct quid-pro-quo corruption. Just take a look at the past actions of Don Blankenship and the WV Supreme Court. But the other important function of contribution limits is to ensure that all West Virginians, no matter how much they make, have an equal voice and equal representation with their state elected officials.

It is this fundamental principle of fairness—so essential to West Virginians—that is violated by the

On election day, **this** shouldn't matter more than your vote. ↘



Support the Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption Platform



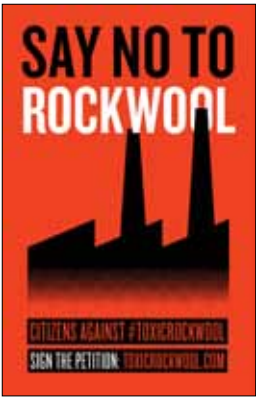
rapid and secret passing of SB 622, which will give more power over our government to the richest few, lobbyists, and wealthy special interests. West Virginia should be a model of government by the people, not for the wealthiest few.

As this newsletter was going to print, people around the state were calling on Governor Justice to veto SB 622. By the time you read this, the governor will have vetoed the bill or signed it in to law. Either way, West Virginia Citizens for Clean Elections will be working on next steps to build a better democracy here in the Mountain State. We'll be working to give the people of West Virginia a real voice in our government through the Pro-Democracy, Anti-Corruption Platform.

Help out! How? Ask [info@wvoter-owned.org](mailto:info@wvoter-owned.org). 🍷



*If you think you are beaten, you are  
If you think you dare not, you don't,  
If you like to win, but you think you can't  
It is almost certain you won't.*  
— Walter D. Wintle



*continued from page 11*  
clear that Rockwool is not welcome in West Virginia.

A fact sheet researched by residents states that Rockwool “will be the largest industrial facility of its kind in the world and operate 24/7. Its giant smokestacks—the largest is 21 stories— will redefine the

county’s skyline and create a health crisis for our public schools. If built, Rockwool will produce more toxic air pollution closer to more school children than any other” WV manufacturing facility.

In a Forbes.com article titled “Rockwool: Three Truths And A Lie About The Economic Development Game,” David Levine writes, “Rockwool was recruited to Jefferson County under a cloak of secrecy... a binding Rockwool development agreement had to be signed, sealed, and delivered before the general public or elected officials could raise an alarm.”

The public has every right to be alarmed over the massive size and pollution levels of this project and the secrecy around it. It is unfair for the chamber to attempt to minimize the public’s concerns, especially when the public has been shut out of the process from the get-go. Trust is lost when there are secretive deals and assurances after-the-fact that permits will protect public health. It’s time for re-imagining our region with cleaner, greener development. 🍷

Have you thought about your legacy? Are you looking for a long-term way to make a meaningful difference in the movement to build a cleaner energy future?

Please consider making a planned gift to OVEC today. Planned giving options include:

- Gifts of stocks and bonds.
- Including OVEC as a beneficiary in your life insurance policy.
- Including OVEC as a beneficiary in your will.

Tax benefits apply to each of these options.

Please contact your attorney or a financial advisor for more info, or go to [lalwv.org](http://lalwv.org).

# Living the Change During Climate Chaos

by Janet Keating, retired  
OVEC executive director



NOAA photo of Hurricane Florence in September, 2018

Recently, for the first time in a few years, I was shrouded in grief, angst, and depression after reading an editorial. It was a Truthout piece, regarding the increasing likelihood of Earth becoming an unlivable planet (“Rethink Activism in the Face of Catastrophic Biological Collapse”).

What is to become of us and this beautiful blue sphere, with its mind-boggling life forms, being wasted by thoughtless development, inaction on climate change, excessive pollution, and various other acts of violence, driven, to a large extent, by human greed? Here we are in the midst of the sixth mass extinction.

I’m generally upbeat, positive, and hopeful, but this editorial hit me like a proverbial ton of bricks. Darkness fell. Melancholy ensued. And the morning after, I was “hungover” from images of ravaged landscapes, brutal storms, and other painful reflections still washing over me; the reality of climate chaos and the tenuous future that our children, grandchildren, and future generations will be facing, brought me to tears throughout the day.

I was already grieving the recent announcement that confirmed the extinction of the Bramble Cay melomys, a small mammal that once lived on a tiny island on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. Its demise is directly attributed to rising sea levels; its habitat essentially was annihilated, and the government of Australia reported that the little critter disappeared due to “human-induced climate change.”

The previous week, I had read articles about the sixth mass extinction currently underway in what I considered unlikely publications (Popular Mechanics and Business Insider). Now that climate disruption is increasingly happening, articles like this are appearing outside of environmental publications.

Climate change and its many impacts have finally gone mainstream.

After sitting with the pain and grief of a bleak and unpredictable future, my sadness transformed to anger that I readily directed toward the latest outrage from the Oval Office.

Not only did Trump vow to remove the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement (the U.S. exit is not a done deal yet), one of his first acts of office, but he also is setting up a committee to “study” the extent of climate change as a national security risk. Not surprisingly, the President’s Committee on Climate Security, will be led by William Happer, who is *not* a climate scientist and who purports to believe that carbon dioxide has been getting a bad rap, that scientists have been “demonizing” this poor molecule. Happer’s CO2 Coalition, a nonprofit that he and others cofounded, pushes climate science denial, promoting their brand of CO2—the gentler kind that greens rather than fries the planet when excessive amounts of it accumulate in the atmosphere.

Even Esquire magazine online—not exactly your “tree huggers” go-to for climate news—ridicules the notion that a climate-change denier like Happer should be leading a committee to undercut what the Pentagon and climate scientists already overwhelmingly agree on: climate change is real, already in motion, and a national security threat.

In case Trump and others need more evidence to change their ways, the Friday after Thanksgiving 2018, 13 federal agencies including the Department of Defense, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, as well as a group of independent scientists from across the country, released the *Fourth National Climate Assessment*. This report, despite



Trump's ignorant denial, clearly concludes that global climate change is already wreaking havoc in the U.S.—droughts, intense wildfires, floods, rising seas, and heatwaves.

But wait! There's more. The 1,600 page report also outlines how climate change is impacting human health (more disease-carrying insects such as mosquitos and ticks; think West Nile Virus, Zika, and Lyme disease) and resources (such as declining water tables in the Colorado Basin). Sadly, our vulnerable populations, the poor, elders, and children, suffer the greatest impacts. I won't even go into the billions of dollars in economic losses from climate disasters in the past decade.

Adding insult to injury, climate change is already displacing some of our nation's indigenous populations. For example, the entire community of Isle de Jean Charles, Louisiana, is in the process of completely relocating the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw Tribe. Via a grant from the U.S. Housing and Development Authority, so far, \$48.3 million is being used for planning how to move and resettle the whole community, previously settled there after the enactment of the shameful Indian Removal Act of 1830.

Another tribe, the Quinault, that lives on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State reported: "Virtually all of the resources and activities that our treaties protect—fishing, gathering, and hunting—are impacted by the effects of climate change."

Like the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe, their land is disappearing under their feet. Having lived on this land long before a treaty established their reservation in 1855, they are considering the unthinkable—moving away from ancestral lands not only because of changes already affecting their lives and livelihoods, but also for fear of even greater calamities brought on by climate instability.

But, as a wise person once remarked, "Wherever you go, there you are." We may be able to keep moving for a while to avoid the immediate impacts of climate disruption, but what about the social, economic, and political chaos that will inevitably ensue? How do we humans deal with all of that?

I still want to believe that some very bold, concrete steps taken by an enlightened government now, urged on by an engaged, thoughtful people can, at the very least, help slow the impacts of decades of ignorance and inaction.

Consider doing your part by contacting state and federal lawmakers to urge immediate action on climate change. Then, do more. More of us need to actively oppose increased gas production, i.e., fracking, in north-central West Virginia. Check out OVEC's website for all the ways that fracking is destroying people's way of life in rural areas, polluting water, and increasing harmful air emissions that contribute to climate change.

The toll from fracking is already enormous. Why would politicians be pushing for more? That's what they are doing when they are promoting construction of the Appalachian Storage Hub, which, if built, would create a vast petrochemical complex in the Ohio Valley to manufacture plastics. The feedstock for this plastic would come from increased fracking.

OVEC is leading the charge to oppose the Appalachian Storage Hub. Join OVEC to oppose and prevent this massive petrochemical corridor, which would bring more toxic pollution and more greenhouse gas emissions to our region. State and federal policies we insist on today can buy some time for our nation and the globe, to prepare for the unimaginable challenges ahead.

The Truthout editorial speaks of "deep adaptation" as one possible approach to the impending crises ahead. Consider growing your own food, zealously protecting water, and living lightly on the land. These things, though, will take time and preparation.

In the short-term, however, nothing prevents us from deepening our connections to the earth and her creatures, along with strengthening and solidifying bonds between family, friends, neighbors and like-minded people who volunteer for and support OVEC.

While the final outcome for humans and life on earth is not yet clear, by creating an authentic, caring community, we can at least hold one another when the storms are raging. 🍓



# An Overlooked Reason Why the Petro Hub is a Bad Idea

by OVEC volunteer Mary Wildfire

*A version of this essay ran as an op-ed in the February 2 issue of the Charleston Gazette-Mail.*

Area newspapers are full of editorials and op-eds lauding the proposed petrochemical storage hub as the salvation of the Ohio Valley. Others discuss the downside: the risks of air and water pollution, the degradation of a quiet, rural landscape into an industrial zone, and the increase in drilling and fracking it would spur, with all the associated harms in the nearby gasfields of the Marcellus and Utica Shales. Health threats are also mentioned, as is climate change.

But I see another risk nobody seems to be talking about. If proponents have their way, scores of billions of dollars will be sunk into this complex of storage caverns, crackers, and plastic plants, plus the pipelines to connect them all and to connect to the source. What if the complex doesn't operate long?

We will be left with an enormous, ugly mess lining the Ohio River and likely no money and other resources left either to clean it up or to build something more practical. I see two possible reasons why this might happen.

One is the possibility that the resource is not nearly as extensive as claimed. David Hughes, a Canadian geologist, produced a report a few years ago called *Drilling Deeper*, in which he examined the data, well by well, for shale oil and gas in the U.S. He found that estimates by the U.S. Energy Information Administration are highly optimistic in essentially all cases; the word he used for the Marcellus was “extremely” optimistic. The report notes that drillers here, in an effort to become profitable, are concentrating on “sweet spots”—and when those are exhausted, they will have to turn to less promising



*Solar panels and redbud in bloom on the Roane County, WV land trust where Mary Wildfire lives.*

sections.

Wait—to *become* profitable? Aren't they profitable now? Not according to a series by DeSmog Blog (see <https://bit.ly/2qOpnIK>), which suggests that most of the gas companies are struggling to pay creditors (one of the posts says they want to cut costs by automating, which executives say will improve worker safety—by eliminating workers). The hub is

intended to make use of the natural gas liquids that are a byproduct of the “dry gas” that is burned for heat or electricity generation.

The other threat to the long-term viability of the petrochemical complex is that it will ultimately be blocked by environmental concerns—either local ones such as those mentioned in the first paragraph or the global ones of climate change and plastic pollution. Key to

the complex, after all, is the production of plastics. Industry claims to see a huge increase in demand, but people all over the world are increasingly concerned about the intractable problem of plastic pollution in the oceans, where it lasts for centuries and harms wildlife.

Crackers and plastic plants also increase the local cancer rate, particularly for their workers, as well as other health problems. Meanwhile, renewable energy and batteries keep getting cheaper. So, between the possibility of economics causing a decline of the natural gas liquids' source and people being unwilling to accept the “externalities,” an enormously expensive petrochemical complex could become a stranded asset.

So, then we'd finally get serious about a rapid

Is your OVEC membership up to date? Your membership dues and donations help keep OVEC at work for our future. You can update your membership, join for the first time, and donate online at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org). Also, check out [ohvec.org/kroger](http://ohvec.org/kroger) and remember to relink your card annually. Need help? Call the office at 304-522-0246.

buildout of renewable energy, right? Maybe not: It might be too late. Some who advocate for the termination of all new fossil fuel projects and their replacement with renewable energy may not realize this, but the production of solar panels is very energy-intensive and exacting. Windmills require huge amounts of steel and concrete. *We should* increase the speed of the transition, many-fold, but it will require fossil fuel energy to do it. Some say solar and wind can't power their own replacement; this is not true, they repay their energy cost many times over.

There aren't enough windmills and solar arrays yet to power the building of additional wind and solar equipment. We have to use fossil fuels for this. If we wait until we hear the sucking sound of fossil fuels running out, it will be too late. We will then be stuck with not only the effects of the climate change we've already baked into the system, but also no advanced energy sources for future generations.

Candles and horses were good enough for our ancestors, but there were a lot fewer people then; I'd rather my grandchildren had access to LED lights, refrigerators, and computers. And, if they stay in West Virginia, I'd rather they be able to visit the Ohio River and enjoy the view and even catch some fish. Ideally, if we had responsible and visionary leadership, plenty of jobs making alternatives to plastics would be available along with those creating clean energy from wind, water, and sun. But it will take public pressure to bring this about.

Help build the public pressure! Get involved in OVEC's work in resisting the Appalachian Storage Hub and insisting on the build-up of renewable power sources. 🍌

## Renewables are Doable!

*We can overcome the political roadblocks to renewable energy; type these recent headlines into a search engine to read the news:*

- 🍌 **Shale gas boom slows progress on renewables in PJM grid territory**
- 🍌 **Rise of renewables creating 'new world', says report**
- 🍌 **Conservative Ohio voters want most of Ohio's electricity to come from renewable sources**
- 🍌 **Renewables overtake coal as Germany's main energy source**
- 🍌 **New renewable energy now as cheap as existing coal stations**



*continued from page 2*

Singer-songwriter Kate Long strummed a transition from the faith-based to the secular portion of our forum, as we all sang *Peace Like A River* and concluded with Mike Morningstar's *Mountaineers are Always Free*.

OVEC's Robin Blakeman, who led the second portion of our program, spoke about the threat of unconventional gas extraction (fracking) and other proposed infrastructure for the gas industry. Other speakers included Gary Zuckett, WV Citizen Action Group; Angie Rosser, from WV Rivers Coalition, who provided a call to action on the legislature's proposed water standards; and Karan Ireland, of the WV Environmental Council.

Four members of the West Virginia House of Delegates encouraged citizen activism to protect water. Our gratitude to Delegates Barbara Fleischauer, Mike Pushkin, Evan Hansen, and John Doyle, who spoke about their support for strong water standards in West Virginia.

We concluded with a candlelight vigil on the banks of the Kanawha River. 🍌



*Top: Attendees at the event. Above: Speakers included then board member Reverend Rose Edington and her husband Reverend Mel Hoover. Both are retired UU ministers.*

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# Reimagine Our Appalachian Region

## **To make the change we need, we have to ROAR!**

We envision and need the kind of economic development in the Ohio River Valley that brings about a just and sustainable future.

These hills and hollers are the perfect places to achieve healthy, sustainable, and vibrant communities. Many of us are already actively creating this better future for our Mountain State, so we have much to learn from one another. That's why, on the first Tuesday of the month this spring and summer, OVEC is hosting a series of ROAR workshops at our office in Huntington's Old Central City.

OVEC organizer Alex Cole will lead our first workshop, in which he will discuss permaculture and living off the grid. Alex practices what he preaches, as an off-grid permaculturalist/farmer. He has background as a naturalist, an extension agent, and a landscaper, too.

Alex says, "When I envision an ideal future for our state and region, it looks a lot like our past. Small, relatively self-sufficient farms spread out evenly along streams and across ridges. Country stores within walking distance of each other. Interconnected vital communities that come together and help when things get tough or just when something needs done.

"It sounds idealistic I know, but we here are a lot closer to that ideal than people in a lot of other places. It is easy to get overwhelmed looking at the big picture, but there are little things we can do to make things better, and it starts with yourself in your home.

"I know there are plenty of folks out there leading by example already. I look forward to meeting with as many of you as I can, and hearing your visions and plans for a better West Virginia."

**Join us for our first ROAR workshop:  
Living Off the Grid on a Budget with Alex Cole  
Tuesday, May 7  
Doors open 6:30 p.m. Program begins at 7 p.m.  
at the OVEC office, 725 14th St. W., Huntington WV, 25704  
*Bring your dinner if you like.***

Please see our online calendar at [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org) for the latest on the workshops. For more info, or if you have an idea for a workshop, email [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org) or call us at 304-522-0246.