

Fall 2020



Winds of Change

Supporting Organized Voices and Empowered Communities Since 1987

Huntington, WV

OVEC

www.ohvec.org

ReImagine Appalachia

Sunrise from Sharp Top Mountain in Bedford, VA. Photo by Isaac Wendland.

This summer, OVEC joined organizations from across Appalachia in forming a new coalition to create a policy blueprint for the region. Our plan, titled ReImagine Appalachia, is a policy framework that envisions a different future for the traditionally extraction-based economies of West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

With the help of federal investment, the framework is designed to create new jobs and rebuild the middle class by modernizing the electric grid, cleaning up abandoned fossil fuel infrastructure, and investing in manufacturing such as plastics alternatives. The plan also advocates for the revival of the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal-era job creation and conservation program.

“Our vision creates a federal jobs program that can put people back to work in largely outdoor jobs, while simultaneously helping us to address the climate crisis and the need for racial justice, while

also maximizing the creation of good union jobs,” says Amanda Woodrum, a senior researcher with Policy Matters Ohio.

Since the public rollout in June, the platform has been endorsed by more than 80 individuals and organizations, including OVEC, Freshwater Accountability Project, Concerned Ohio River Residents, Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action, and the WV Environmental Council.

The plan emphasizes how our region’s lush forests could be one key to addressing climate change.

“For too long corporations have used our resources for their own profits while damaging our health and environment. With Appalachia’s natural assets, we have all the tools to provide great jobs for our people, while doing our part to create a healthier future for our children by addressing the climate crisis,” says planning committee member Angie

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‘BLACK LIVES MATTER’ IS THE MINIMUM

I Can't Breathe...

by Janet Keating

As the COVID-19 pandemic started, I thought back to the early 1990s, when I worked toward a master's degree in biology at Marshall University. Because ecology was my primary focus, the science of emerging viruses sparked my interest, as our ever-developing globe encroached upon undisturbed habitats across the world. This development not only uncovered unknown viruses, but it also placed wildlife, which may be vectors of viruses and bacteria, in much closer contact with humans.

What I learned then helped me to understand the possible route this novel coronavirus took to infect our human population—globally, millions infected and more than 200,000 U.S. citizens dead (as this issue of WOC goes to press). Although the origins of COVID-19 are still not entirely clear, what is known is that the virus made a leap (zoonosis) from a mammal in China to humans—perhaps at a meat market in Wuhan.

It's sobering to think that one human infected with an invisible packet of essentially mobile genetic material (the virus) started the global pandemic that has brought our nation to its knees.

The pandemic has pulled back the curtain on major challenges our society faces—systemic racism and climate change, all worsened by poverty/pollution/economics, and historical and current political policies. Many African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinx Americans are heroically serving this nation during the pandemic as low-paid, essential healthcare workers, farm laborers, assembly line workers, warehouse workers, and more. Many are paying the ultimate price with their lives.

If battling a pandemic isn't challenge enough, climate change is raging in 2020, too. As I write this, dozens of major, ferocious wildfires and a record-

Pandemic
Climate
Racism
Poverty

setting heatwave are scorching California. The death toll is rising and more than a hundred thousand people have fled their homes for shelter. The 2020 hurricane season is record-setting and deadly. Hurricane Laura wrought major destruction in Louisiana, where the death toll stands at 26. Potable water and electricity have yet to be restored for the 80,000-plus residents of the Lake Charles area. More than 220,000 people

are without running water. Restoration of water and electricity services could take weeks or months, and full rebuilding could take years.

This begs the question: Where can a person safely shelter during a pandemic that is spread when people are in close quarters,

when his/her/their home is in the path of a raging fire or a disastrous Category 4 hurricane? Where do you shelter when you are homeless?



The Oppression of Politics

Whether we are looking at racism, poverty, the COVID-19 pandemic, pollution, or climate change, people of color (POC) are disproportionately affected. The systemic racism, which has been present since our nation's inception, sustained for hundreds of years by people in power, and is now inflamed by the current administration, exacerbates these issues and also pits our nation's citizens against one another. We are witnessing peaceful protests against racism and police brutality on a near daily basis since the brutal killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. While the police violence against POC continues, extremists who have their own political agendas are disrupting peaceful protests and sowing discord and confusion by causing property damage, creating chaos, and now committing murder.

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OVEC Hires Administrative Director



Here we grow again! We recently welcomed another member to our team. Matt Spurlock, OVEC's new administrative director, has joined our staff following the retirement of our longtime finance person, Maryanne Graham. (Read more about Maryanne on page 8.)

Born and raised in the Huntington area, Matt not only has a keen eye for numbers and a penchant for leadership, but he is also deeply familiar with our region and the issues we work to address in our community.

Matt attended Sunnyside Elementary School, located in Apple Grove, WV, near the site of the proposed pulp and paper mill that OVEC successfully defeated in 1997. Later, when he was in college, an assignment led him to investigate the pulp mill issue and he became more familiar with OVEC's work through an article written by Janet Keating.

As administrative director, Matt is a behind-the-scenes, but vitally important, staff member at OVEC. The bulk of his work entails handling payroll, income, and expenses for the organization. He also confers with the auditor and files regular reports to state and federal authorities. He meets with OVEC's Board of Directors Finance Committee, prepares quarterly reports for OVEC's board of directors, and is also a key person in sending membership renewal and donation letters.

Matt currently resides in Huntington with his husband and their troop of cats.

Contact Matt for information about memberships or other no-cost ways of giving at matt@ohvec.org. Plus, stay tuned for an introduction to two additional new staff in our next issue. 🍌

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

Competing Reports Offer Different Outlook On Ohio Valley's Future

Excerpt from a July 1 Ohio Valley Resource article by Brittany Patterson.
Read the full story here: bit.ly/304SI3K

A new report by the Trump administration suggests the Ohio Valley's growing petrochemical industry could be an unprecedented source of economic opportunity and growth when the county, and region, eventually emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. But the assessment is drawing criticism from environmental groups and some financial analysts that warn the risk is growing for plastics and petrochemical manufacturers...

Officials in the region have been working on the so-called Appalachian Storage and Trading Hub for nearly a decade. The natural-gas storage hub cleared its first major hurdle in 2018, when it received approval for the first of two phases for a \$1.9 billion U.S. Department of Energy loan. A previous DOE report, requested by lawmakers in Congress, found the hub is crucial for growing the region's petrochemical industry.

Sarah Carballo, with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, a regional advocacy group, said the new DOE report did not take into account the growing financial risk associated with a regional petrochemical industry buildout or the concerns of some residents in the region.

"Communities across Appalachia deserve viable, fair, and sustainable economic transition strategies that protect public health and environmental

quality," she said. "So, instead of investing in petrochemicals and coal as a basis for economic renaissance—industries that poison our land, air, water, communities—we think it's time for our leaders to explore more feasible and sustainable economic development strategies that provide long-term prosperity for the people of our region."

"Communities across Appalachia deserve viable, fair, and sustainable economic transition strategies that protect public health and environmental quality."

- Sarah Carballo, OVEC

An analysis released last month by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), a think tank whose mission is to accelerate the transition to a diverse and sustainable-energy economy, painted a much less rosy picture for the Ohio Valley's budding petrochemical industry.

The report focused on Shell's petrochemical complex currently under construction near Pittsburgh in Beaver County. Once completed, the facility will include an ethane cracker and polyethylene production complex slated to produce 1.6 million tons of ethylene each year and to permanently employ about 600 workers, according to the company.

The IEEFA analysis found changing market conditions, exacerbated further by the coronavirus pandemic, call into question the economic viability of Shell's cracker plant and other petrochemical investments in the Ohio Valley.

Invest in people, not pollution! 🍌

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Rosser, executive director of the WV Rivers Coalition.

From the beginning, the coalition has held listening sessions to develop the blueprint and intends to hold more community engagement events leading up to the general election in November.

ReImagine
Appalachia

In the coming months, the coalition will roll out a series of white papers fleshing out the details of the framework, and will continue to seek additional input and support union leaders, grassroots and grassstops organizations, thought leaders, elected officials, and you! Please get involved in OVEC's ReImagine Appalachia work; contact us at 304-522-0246. 🍌

Legal Action Means Setback for Proposed Petrochemical/Plastics Buildout!

ODNR Cancels Mountaineer NGL Storage Permits

In late September, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) announced that it has cancelled permits it had previously granted to Powhatan Salt Company LLC to drill three solution mining wells into underground salt formations in Monroe County, OH, along the Ohio River.

The wells would be used for Mountaineer NGL Storage to create huge caverns to store fracked gas liquids—ethane, propane, and butane—for use by petrochemical manufacturers, such as the proposed Belmont County (OH) PTT Global Chemical cracker plant. The storage facility would be owned by Mountaineer NGL Storage and would be one critical component of a massive petrochemical buildout proposed for our region.

To construct the caverns, Mountaineer NGL would use the wells to inject millions of gallons of fresh water from the river into the underground salt formation. The company plans to store much of the resulting salt solution on site in a large lake they intend to build above Route 7 and the Ohio River. This lake is needed so operators can pump the solution in and out to maintain pressure in the storage cavern under the river. Excess salt water would be moved by a pipeline under the Ohio River to the Natrium processing plant in West Virginia. What could go wrong?

ODNR's cancellation of the solution mining well permits comes at Powhatan Salt Company's request, and that is the result of action we took.

In late August, Concerned Ohio River Residents, FreshWater Accountability Project, Buckeye

Environmental Network, OVEC, and Sierra Club filed a writ of mandamus before the 10th District Court of Appeals in Franklin County (OH). Earthjustice represented us in this legal action, in which we asked that the appeals court force the ODNR to revoke the permits because the agency had issued them without giving public notice, allowing public comment, or preparing a draft permit, in violation of their own regulations.

In the legal filing, we note that construction and operation of the caverns would create an eyesore along the Ohio River, could lead to spills that would harm private and public water supplies, and could pose an explosive hazard should the facility begin storing fracked gas liquids.

In a September 18 letter to ONDR, Powhatan Salt Company said it was aware of our legal action and that "the filing of the mandamus action has cast uncertainty over ODNR's issuance of those permits which we believe can most effectively and expeditiously be resolved

by our request that ODNR cancel the three permits without prejudice to its consideration of new permit applications for the three wells."

Now, ODNR and Powhatan Salt Company will have to go through public notice, comment, draft permitting, and fact-sheet preparation in order to receive the permits. And that's where you come in: Your comments count! Contact CORR on their Facebook page or OVEC at 304-522-0246 or info@ohvec.org to get involved in next steps. 🍌

This is a huge win for the autonomy of the Ohio River Valley's people. We cannot allow companies to walk into our community and store highly explosive and toxic chemicals under our river, our drinking water, without the bare minimum of public comment.

- Alex Cole, OVEC

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!

The Petrochemical Industry's New Recycling Stunt



By Alex Cole

The petrochemical industry has a new marketing tactic in the works. A process dubbed “chemical plastic recycling” is the latest innovation in waste management, but it isn’t exactly what most people think happens when they put plastic out on the corner or in a blue bin.

According to a study by National Geographic, since 1950, only about nine percent of plastic produced has been recycled even once. Currently, more than half of the world’s plastic is discarded in landfills, oceans, or somewhere else in the environment, and approximately a quarter of the plastic produced in the world today is incinerated (burned), a highly toxic process that spews chemicals into the air, usually in poor and disenfranchised communities.

Though a percentage of plastic waste is ultimately recycled, there are still significant problems with plastic recycling. Unlike glass and aluminum that can be recycled indefinitely, when plastic is recycled, the quality and durability of the recycled material decreases. Even worse, because of the fracking boom over the past dozen years, the virgin feedstock made from ethane and other oil and natural gas derivatives is so inexpensive that it often does not make economic sense to recycle plastic at all. It is, and it always has been, cheaper to make new pure plastic and avoid the energy, time, and resources involved

in taking old plastic and attempting to make it new again.

In essence: Plastic recycling is a myth.

But, what does this have to do with the Ohio River Valley? Well, with all the news going on, you might have missed an article in the Herald-Dispatch titled “Plastic Recycling Company Seeks Funding for Lawrence County Plant.”

PureCycle Technologies is the name emblazoned on the side of the plant, and, if you believe their website, you would think that they are a plucky little start-up, trying to find the solution to our ever-growing plastics problem. They proclaim to have discovered a groundbreaking new process to break down recycled plastic chemically, remove impurities, and make new “virgin-like” plastic pellets. However, they fail to mention where the impurities go and what may be released into the air and groundwater during this process.

If you investigate the website, you start to realize that this “Billion Dollar Start-Up,” as Forbes Magazine calls it, is so much more. Industry behemoth Proctor and Gamble is behind the development, as are the billionaire former CEO of Walgreens and venture capitalist Greg Wasson, along with a business incubator from Chicago, Illinois, called Innventure.

To me, all these players sound like three layers of

BLACK LIVES ARE WORTHY

liability protection for throwing a bunch of money at an unproven, publicly popular, and potentially toxic research and development chemistry set.

But that's not enough: They don't want to gamble with only their own money, of which they have plenty, but they are also asking for some of ours. The article in the Herald Dispatch was actually about a tax-exempt \$300 million indemnified bond that The Southern Ohio Port Authority and Lawrence County, Ohio, want to offer lowly little PureCycle Technology to try this new technology.

But why? Why here? And why now? The industry is feeling the public relations pressure. These companies know that ultimately their mess is more than this planet and its people can handle.

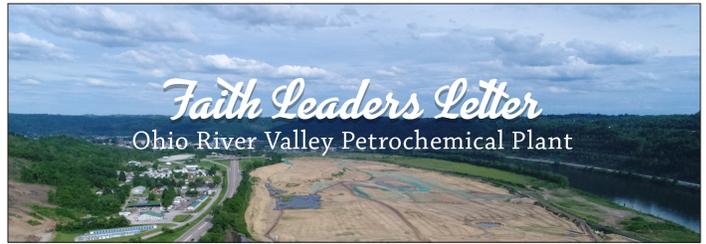
They also know that the simpler solution is to stop production of single-use plastics and return to reusables. But they don't want to do so; they make money making more trash.

It's cheaper to lend their names to some venture capital and pretend to look for solutions, thus shielding themselves from liability and externalizing any potential environmental risk onto people who need the jobs. Their schtick aims to make us feel like they are doing good, being green, being sustainable, and actually recycling plastic, instead of burning and pitching most of it. But we can't fall for the lies anymore.

So, why would they locate this new venture here? Toxic land is cheap, and we need jobs, so it seems we have fallen prey to the anything-is-better-than-nothing-at-all mentality. Because of it, we risk being saddled with the unforeseen costs of the latest and greatest petrochemical revolution—toxic land, water, and air—while everyone involved goes bankrupt and flees, having made their buck but leaving no money for the cleanup in our communities.

Again, we cannot fall for the lies anymore. We have been through this cycle before, and it's time to do better by truly eliminating the source of the problem: plastic production.

Stay current on what we are up to:
Read our blog and subscribe to our
YouTube channel and
action alerts at ohvec.org.
Join in! Contact one of our organizers
via info@ohvec.org or 304-522-0246.



Faith Leaders Speak Up Against Petrochemicals

OVEC project coordinator Robin Blakeman, in conjunction with faith leaders in Ohio River Valley communities and the WV Interfaith Power and Light, which she helped found, is leading a letter-writing campaign centered on the PTTG ethane cracker plant proposed for construction in Belmont County, OH.

Anyone can join in e-signing a letter written by the faith leaders that will be sent to local elected leaders and PTTG officials. The letter outlines some critical concerns related to the construction of this proposed petrochemical cracker plant.

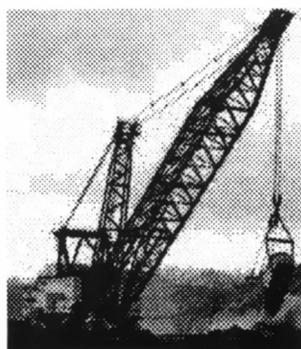
The faith leaders write, "Many of us believe: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,' as the Psalmist in the Jewish and Christian traditions says."

They also note, "Look around you," says the Buddhist monk Thich Naht Hanh, "what you see is not your environment—it is you."

Read the entire letter, sign it, and send it to the officials from this webpage: bit.ly/3g53qq4. 🍌



Azrael on the Mountain



Victor Depta

Blair Mountain

Press, friend of OVEC and advocate for the environment, has published such excellent works as *Coal: A Poetry Anthology* and *Azrael on the Mountain* (that protests mountaintop removal). BMP is celebrating 20 years of activism and art.

As a tribute, BMP will donate 10 percent of all

proceeds from their 2020 sales to OVEC.

Thank you, BMP! See blairmtp.net. 🍌

Thank You, Maryanne Graham!

by Janet Keating

Clear, focused, intelligent, honest, dependable, fair-minded, straight-talking, wise, and committed are terms that come to mind when I think of Maryanne Graham, both in her professional role at OVEC and as my dear friend. I feel so fortunate to know and for many years (24-plus) to have worked closely with her. The first time I saw Maryanne, she was carrying Morgan (her newborn baby girl) up the stairs to my house in a baby seat. She agreed to take on the role of being OVEC's finance person—keeping a close eye on OVEC's financial resources. Little did any of us know then how big this job would become.

Back then, Maryanne was a full-time mother and wife to newborn Morgan and Graham, a toddler, and she was teaching science part-time at Ohio University in Ironton, OH. I knew that she had lived in Marietta, OH, as a young girl, and that she and her husband, Ralph Oberly (Ph.D. professor at Marshall University), were living in the country outside of Chesapeake, OH. Early on, because OVEC didn't have a big budget, her work was limited to only a few hours per week. As OVEC co-founder Dianne Bady loved to say, in the early 90s, OVEC had tens of dollars! I seldom saw Maryanne until OVEC moved into the current office location in Central City in 1998.

After OVEC organizer Laura Forman died in 2001, Maryanne and I drew closer to one another. Maryanne's personality is much like the phrase I heard as a child, used to describe people who were quiet: "Still waters run deep." I found out soon enough that, although she was quiet by nature, she was often the person I turned to when I needed help making difficult decisions. Maryanne, when I was in tears and at odds with someone regarding work, wisely said, in essence, "You shouldn't take this personally. This is about work, not about you as a

person." The effect was like a light going on in my head: From that day forward, I began learning how to separate my work from me as a person—not an easy task when much of the work is about dealing with injustices to people and the land.



Maryanne is like the eye of a hurricane—calm despite everything swirling around her. How in the world was she able to attend to details in the "great room," where her desk, phone, and computer were situated, with constant interruptions? The copy machine was there. It was the point of entry for visitors. Her space included the kitchen area, where staff members and volunteers would congregate to chat, grab

a snack from the fridge, make lunch, or fix coffee. Thankfully, for the past several years, since OVEC bought and remodeled the building, she has had her own office and can finally close the door!

Maryanne was my rock and, in many ways, the person who kept OVEC's "heart" beating. If you've never served on a board for a non-profit organization, you wouldn't know all the many important details involved in keeping an organization in good financial standing—state, local, and federal filings, as well as providing the executive director and board of directors various financial statements at quarterly meetings, working with others to develop the annual operating budget, tracking grant dollars from multiple foundations, paying bills, and doling out expense checks to staff (and ensuring every expense paid out had a receipt attached), writing paychecks, annual audits, and on and on and on. But wait. There's more!

Maryanne has provided services to OVEC above and beyond keeping the organization financially fit. Just as her kids outgrew those precious little rain boots and cowboy boots they often wore when she stopped by the office, OVEC staff, membership,



and programs expanded, and it was Maryanne who stepped up to make sure we had an appropriate database to track memberships. She worked closely with a consultant to make sure that the database would work for OVEC and that our staff had the training needed to use it. She has always been the “go-to” person with technical questions or computer glitches. I swear to you, when I’d have a problem with a computer program, all she had to do was walk into my office, and a miracle would occur!

Although most of her efforts have been behind the scenes, Maryanne has been essential and integral to OVEC’s success as what I love to call a “little-big” organization. Without her diligence, eye for detail, and expertise, OVEC couldn’t have become the nationally and internationally award-winning organization it is today. And, as savvy as she is at the office, if an important protest or event were planned, you could find her there as a valuable member of the OVEC team. Besides being impeccable with OVEC’s finances, she truly cares about the Earth, the world in which her kids (and someday, grandkids) live. She walks the talk—remodeling her home with non-toxic materials, recycling, eating healthy, and driving a Tesla!

Thank goodness, Maryanne is not all business, though. We always had good times, dancing at the annual Treehuggers’ Ball or hanging out during staff retreats. And because we are also good friends, I could always count on Maryanne to show up on special occasions (before COVID-19), ready to relax, share some laughs and a good glass of wine and dance, dance, dance! She has always striven for balance—body, mind, and spirit.

On a more personal note, Maryanne’s been a stalwart friend. She’s picked me up more than once, both literally and figuratively. Whether I broke down on the Interstate or just broke down, she has never failed to be there for me. COVID has kept us from our monthly girls’ night out, but I’m looking forward to those special nights when we can safely resume them.

It’s hard to imagine OVEC without Maryanne’s steady, reliable presence, yet I know that during her time there, she has developed and refined an operations manual for whoever follows her (see related story on page 3). Knowing her, I can be sure she’s included everything important for OVEC’s continued well being.

How in the world can I express my heartfelt gratitude for all the quiet dedication, love, and support you’ve shown me in my former role as executive director of OVEC? I could not have done so well without your knowledge, support, advice, and expertise. I know Vivian, our current ED, feels exactly the same way. With much of your work being done behind the scenes, I hope you know how much I value you, one of OVEC’s unsung heroes. You, along with other dedicated staffers, have made OVEC a top-notch organization. Thank you for a job beyond well done.

Whatever comes next as you retire from OVEC, I’m convinced you will do it with the same flare, style, and thoroughness. First, take a little time to rest—do all those things you so deserve that make your heart sing. You have more than earned it. Good luck in all your new endeavors! 🍓

Now Hear This

Corps Fails; Citizens Hold Own Hearing

What do you do when a government agency won't listen to you? Make them listen!

Background

An alarming situation arose over the summer when, unbeknownst to the public, three companies submitted applications to obtain permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to construct three barge terminals for transporting radioactive liquid drilling wastes from the oil and gas industry on the Ohio River.

The OVEC office, and many OVEC members, allies and immediate family members are among the more than five million people who rely on the Ohio River for tap water. We live downstream from all three of the proposed oil and gas waste barge docks. We demand there be a cumulative impact study done on the potentially catastrophic effects of all of these facilities—both on aquatic wildlife, and on the water quality in the River.

Despite the fact that the millions of us rely on the Ohio River for our drinking water, the 981-mile river is already notoriously one of the most polluted rivers in the nation according to the Environmental Protection Agency. The Ohio River Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO), an interstate agency that sets water quality standards for the river, notes that 23 million pounds of toxic discharges are dumped annually into the river from industries and manufacturing processes all along its shoreline.

The proposed barge docks would be conduits for tons of radioactive oil and gas wastewater to travel on the Ohio River and into a site already riddled with environmental problems—i.e. PFAS/PFOA contamination, etc. We have heard from wildlife experts in the area that the mussel population and natural habitat for those creatures are both in a very fragile state, and likely would be heavily damaged if/when there is a major spill in the area. All the more reason for a cumulative impact study.



"We are concerned citizens of the Ohio River Valley, who will ultimately be the ones impacted by decisions being made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to allow oil and gas waste to be barged on the Ohio River."

Public Input Not Welcome

To date, the Corps has only allowed one public meeting on one of these proposed facilities, an operation by DeepRock Solutions, LLC, just south of Marietta, OH, and that meeting was an absolute sham.

Participants said the Corps' August 7 public meeting denied concerned citizens the opportunity to make their voices heard about the permit for this operation, which would allow DeepRock to accept radioactive oil and gas waste shipped on the Ohio River. Many people attempted but were ultimately unable to participate in the meeting.

"Not only was it very poorly run, multiple steps were necessary to register," says Robin Blakeman, a project coordinator with OVEC, "and changes were made at the last minute."

Public Demands to Be Heard

People were deeply frustrated with the Corps' sham public meeting. Sarah Carballo, an OVEC staff member, sums up that frustration: "It is the duty of regulatory agencies, especially those charged with protecting the public interest, to provide citizens with fair and transparent opportunities for input on these matters."

That's why OVEC joined with other citizen groups to host our own public event so that folks could have a more complete opportunity to voice their concerns. On August 27, nearly 20 people convened on Zoom to deliver their own testimonies.

As we go to press in late September, OVEC volunteer Connie Sayles, along with Robin and Sarah, are set to deliver a transcript of the comments from our own people's hearing to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers office in Huntington, WV, so they can actually hear from the public. Stay tuned! 🌰

ORSANCO and the Ohio River: That's a Lot of Water, But Is it Safe to Drink?

OVEC is a member group of WOAC, the Watershed Organizations Advisory Committee, which interacts with ORSANCO.

ORSANCO is the Ohio River Valley Sanitation Commission, an interstate water pollution control commission created in 1948 by eight states. Its mission is to regulate activities in the rivers, streams, and waters of the Ohio River Basin (as it exists within the eight states) and to mitigate existing and future surface-water pollution.

As our representatives on WOAC, volunteer Randi Pokladnik and staffer Robin Blakeman joined our allies in attending the June virtual (ORSANCO) meetings on June 10 and 11. Allies include WV River Coalition's Angie Rosser, who is now the chair of WOAC. Congratulations, Angie!

The all-virtual technical and commission meetings were firsts for ORSANCO. The online format allowed for more interaction between a broader range of participants and the commission and technical committee representatives. Questions posted in the chat were answered quickly.

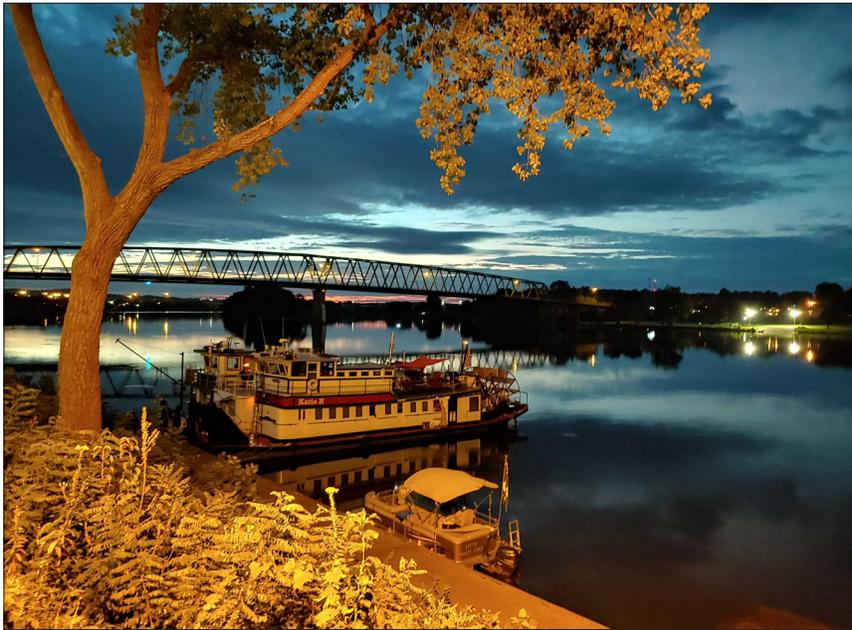
Here's a rundown of some of the topics discussed during the June virtual meetings:

Addressing the challenges of working from home and/or continuing water monitoring processes in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of ORSANCO's monitoring processes—such as fish-tissue sampling—were to have been resumed by early August, or there would be gaps in the 305B report; ORSANCO is working closely with Region 5 EPA officials to figure out how to handle this.

There are limitations to what ORSANCO can do to sample for some critical contaminants, such as bacteria, and organic chemicals; the start of the proposed PFAS sampling program this year is also questionable due to COVID-19.

Emergency response is the least affected function of ORSANCO at this time: ORSANCO officials are working to ensure that emergency/spill response is still possible.



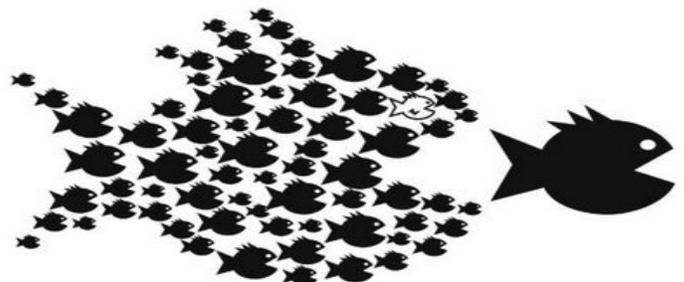
The Ohio River looking picture perfect, but pollution lurks. Photo by Robin Blakeman.

A new impairment from the 2020 Biennial 305b report: two-thirds of the river (641.5 miles) is now impaired for contact/recreational uses.

The WOAC report to the commission included a fact sheet that was developed by OVEC, Concerned Ohio River Residents, and WV Rivers Coalition. We used

the fact sheet to inform the commission about the three oil and gas barge facilities proposed for the Ohio River. (See related story on opposite page.)

For information on what the acronyms above mean or to join in work to defend the Ohio River—drinking water source to about five million people—and its tributaries, email info@ohvec.org or call 304-522-0246. 🍌



ORGANIZE!

The Good River on Fire

by Nicole Lawrence, OVEC Volunteer



Nicole is a resident of Catlettsburg, KY.

When you say “Ohio River,” you are saying “the Good River River,” because “ohio” roughly translated from the Iroquois is “the good river.”

For my birthday, my friend Rachel gave me West Virginia Poet Laureate Louise McNeill’s 1979 book *Elderberry Flood*. The collection’s title refers to floods that would come each spring, sending the white pine logs down river to the mill. The collection is a meditation on the Good River River and its tributaries; it is a collection on the history, lore, and land of West Virginia.

In ways, these poems are dirges. In “Ballad of New River,” McNeill notes that The New River is second-oldest to the Nile, where “Tyrannous stalks, raising his lizard combs.” These poems show us the history of the boats of oil and the boats of coal and the logs swept down where the elder bloom was white.

It’s true about the flooding. In 1937, the Ohio River left a million people homeless. My grandmother, just a kid, survived on a little boat. By today’s numbers, the damages equaled almost nine billion dollars. In 1944, in Catlettsburg, Kentucky, the Good River River flooded again. Again, my grandmother would find herself in a little boat with her family. A photograph shows her clutching her dog Poochie; she is terrified of drowning. She is with her brother and her aunt.

The last time I visited her, the Big Sandy River was on fire. A train transporting ethane derailed, spilling into the river. Nothing new, she said. She showed me a document detailing the coal slurry spill of 2000: An estimated 300 million gallons of coal mine refuse slurry was released from a 72-acre impoundment by Martin County Coal Corporation. The spilled material impacted more than 75 miles of surface water... including the Big Sandy, a tributary of the Ohio River. That tributary supplies her drinking water. She has not drunk water from her tap in 20 years.



A small portion of the aftermath of the 2000 coal slurry spill, three months after it happened.

My great-grandfather was a bigger-than-life man, a tall man, like the poet Charles Olson. He loved wearing women’s perfume, and I remember him always in a brown suit. I’d sit on his knee and he’d tell me corny jokes. He’d take his tie off, tie the Windsor around my neck, and I’d run around the house wearing a necktie and a Little Mermaid nightgown.



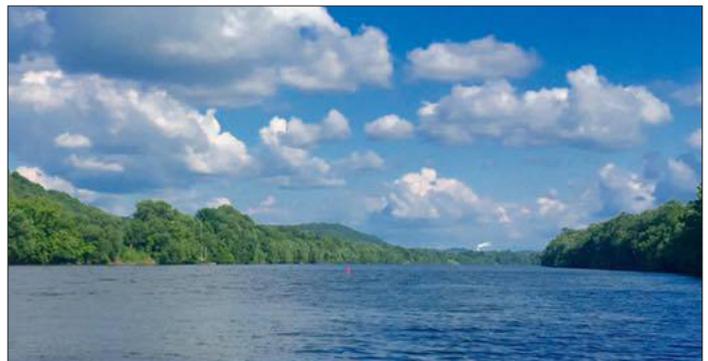
A collection of family photographs shared from Nicole's Earth Day Live video. ▶

Before he was a preacher, he used to shovel coal for the ARMCO Blast Furnace. The blast furnace was by the river. My grandmother remembers her father being covered head to toe in coal dust. Every refinery, fractionator, and mill, is by the Good River River. When she shows me the picture of the blast furnace, I think of McNeill's poem Chemical Valley: "The smoke stacks challenge and defy / The sullied mountain tops and try to lift the rupture of the sky." My great-grandfather would at some point be told he had six months to live and would die a month later from lung cancer.

Did you know there are almost 50 different species of freshwater mussels that live in the Ohio River? I think it is sweet that they are Animalia, animals, maybe like a dog is an animal. They are sometimes called naiads, the mythical nymphs of the river. They have their own lore. You know the health of a river by the health of the mussels, because they are the river's filtration system. Imagine rubbing away the dirt with your thumbs to see the pink mucket, the sheepnose, the fanshell, the spectaclecase, the purple cats paw pearlymussel, and the snuffbox—to see the federally endangered animals of the Ohio.

When you see the pearly iridescent buttons on an old sweater, understand that they used to be the backs of the animals in the muck of the river—I've heard some can live to be 100 years old. How much can you swallow in 100 years?

Now that the river is dammed in places, it does not flood so dramatically, to where the cities are neck-deep and little children are in rowboats clutching their dogs to their chests. I do sometimes wish the water had never gone down, but, rather, had swallowed up the refineries and factories, and the children could start over, sailing away on the good river, the good good river, with the clatter of mussels at their feet. 🌰



The Good River River.

Thank You to Our 2020 Award Recipients

Our Community Keepers Awards are a small way for us to publicly thank a few individuals for their efforts in 2020. We deeply appreciate their time, talent, and commitment to protecting and preserving our communities and the environment.



Bev Reed

Outstanding Community Defender

Bev is a partner with Concerned Ohio River Residents, a citizen advocacy organization that works for a cleaner, more sustainable economic future for the Ohio Valley. Since attending a community meeting held by OVEC in Wheeling, WV, Bev has worked tirelessly in her community in opposition to petrochemical expansion in our region.

“Bev’s constant efforts no doubt play a huge role in local resistance to PTTG, Mountaineer Storage Facility, and the petrochemical hub at large,” says Dustin White, a project coordinator with OVEC. “It has been a pleasure watching Bev grow into a leader and there’s no doubt she is the right person to receive our Outstanding Community Defender Award.”



Center for Coalfield Justice
Outstanding Allied Group

Located in Washington, Pennsylvania, the Center for Coalfield Justice originally formed in 1994 as a grassroots group called the “Tri-State Citizens Mining Network” to help residents in southwestern Pennsylvania stand against the coal mining practices that harmed their clean air, water, and communities. In 2007, they reorganized into Center for Coalfield Justice and have since broadened their work to include other fossil fuel issues including oil, gas, and petrochemical expansion in our region

“Though we are separated by hundreds of miles, OVEC and CCJ’s work and mission have always seemed complementary,” says Dustin White. “Their presence only strengthens the drive for justice in our region.”



Kati Holland

Volunteer of the Year

Kati is one of our amazing stream testing volunteers who helps with monitoring the Wayne County sites near Huntington, WV. She has also helped recruit participants for our pilot air quality monitoring project.

“Kati grew up in this area of Wayne County, and knows the territory well,” says Robin Blakeman, a project coordinator with OVEC. “Her passion for preserving the air and water quality of this part of the state is evident in all she does.”

Kati does everything she can to make sure her community is as healthy as it possibly can be. Without dedicated volunteers like her, we could never boast so many victories since our beginnings in 1987.



Leatra Harper
Outstanding Ally

An Ohio resident, Leatra started a local, nonprofit organization called the FreshWater Accountability Project (FWAP) in response to private water sales to the oil and gas industry in her area. She first got involved with OVEC when she was looking for support to organize in opposition to the proposed petrochemical build-out in the Belmont County area.

“Leatra is an amazing ally,” says Robin Blakeman, a project coordinator with OVEC. “She is present in just about every action we are, and willingly amplifies the messages that we and other community members put out.”



Sue DeVall
Super Citizen Lobbyist

Sue is both an OVEC volunteer and a member of the WV Interfaith Power and Light steering committee. As a practitioner of the Buddhist tradition, and a resident of WV’s Eastern Panhandle, she has added diversity to all the communities she is a part of. Last year, Sue volunteered to travel twice to the Washington, D.C. area with a group of people led by Interfaith Power and Light advisors to advocate for both the RECLAIM Act and the EPA Methane Rules.

She realizes we need “all hands on deck” right now – with everyone doing all that they can – to try to address the multiple challenges of regulatory rollback, just transition, petrochemical build out, and many other issues.



Randi Pokladnik
*Laura Forman
Passion for Justice*

The Laura Forman Passion for Justice Award, OVEC’s highest honor, is named after beloved OVEC organizer Laura Forman— a woman who lived her life and carried out her work with an intense passion for justice. This year, we are pleased to present this special award to Dr. Randi Pokladnik.

A longtime OVEC member born and raised in eastern Ohio, Dr. Pokladnik has lived in the strip-mined coal counties of Jefferson and Harrison for over 60 years. An environmental scientist and retired research chemist, Dr. Pokladnik earned an associate degree in Environmental Engineering, a BA in Chemistry, and MA and PhD in Environmental Studies. She is also certified in hazardous materials regulations and holds teaching licenses in science and math.

Like her fellow Laura Forman Passion for Justice Award winners, Randi is an invaluable asset to OVEC and our mission. Her selfless volunteerism makes our part of the planet a better place for all of us — She is truly a hero in our eyes.

Thank you to all our dedicated volunteers, members and partners — we couldn’t do this work without you! Interested in learning more about our award winners? Listen to excerpts about our award recipients and read more about their many contributions on our website at ohvec.org. 🍌

Renewable Costs Plunge, Coal So Costly



Excerpt from a June 2 engineering and technology article by Jack Loughran

The cost of electricity generated from renewables plunged in 2019, making fossil fuel plants increasingly uneconomical, according to a report from the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

The report says that more than half of the renewable capacity added in 2019 achieved lower power costs than the cheapest new coal plants.

On average, new solar and onshore wind power cost less than keeping many existing coal plants in operation and auction results show this trend accelerating. IRENA said this “reinforced” the case to phase-out coal entirely...

“Renewable energy is increasingly the cheapest source of new electricity, offering tremendous potential to stimulate the global economy and get people back to work. Renewable investments are stable, cost-effective and attractive, offering consistent and predictable returns while delivering benefits to the wider economy,” says Francesco La Camera, director-general of IRENA. 🍌

Submitted by a member who wishes to remain anonymous, the photos at right are of the South Fork Coal mountaintop removal operation in Greenbrier County, WV (2020). Which trash would you rather have in your yard?

Devastating Ecological Irony, Anyone?



I Can't Breathe...

continued from page 2



Participants in a Black Lives Matter rally this summer in Huntington, WV. Photo by Sarah Carballo.

America has so far failed to provide equality and justice for all—not criminal justice, economic justice, nor environmental justice for POC. For example, a 2016 Sentencing Project report highlights Bureau of Justice statistics: 35 percent of state prisoners are white, 38 percent are black, and 21 percent are Hispanic. In 12 states, the percentage of the prison population is greater than 50 percent African American, far higher than the population at large.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, “Multiple analyses of available federal, state, and local data show that POC are experiencing a disproportionate burden of COVID-19 cases and deaths.” Other analysis showed that Black people were twice as likely to die as Whites from the virus. It’s also important to note, that according to the Kaiser Family Fund, 22 percent of Blacks, 24 percent of Native Alaskan Americans and 19 percent of Hispanics (Latinx) lived at or below the U.S. poverty line in 2018, compared with 9 percent of White Americans.

It isn’t rocket science to figure out that people who have low wealth, who are exposed to air or water pollution disproportionately, have poor access to

healthcare or healthy foods, live in cramped quarters, or are imprisoned, are at an increased risk of falling ill or dying from coronavirus.

Racist policies are at the heart of these problems and injustices. Anti-racist policies can provide solutions. The Green New Deal aims to be anti-racist and would provide good-paying clean energy jobs and strive to mitigate the impacts of climate change. We need to do our part to pressure politicians to support anti-racist policies, address climate change, provide a living wage along with healthcare/child-care for all, and tackle judicial reform. Above all, we need to vote. And we need to encourage others around us to vote for leaders who support our views of a just and equitable future for everyone!

As bad as things feel right now, there is room for optimism and hope. When I see the throngs of young people—POC, white, and LGBTQ folks, taking a stand together, I know the passion and heart that drives them. They envision our country with leaders who serve the common good. Although, in my lifetime, our nation has been inching slowly towards racial equality and justice, now is the time for a warp-speed leap. 🍌

BLACK LIVES ARE NEEDED

Voting By Mail? Be In the Know

All WV voters have the option of voting absentee due to concerns about COVID-19. This is the safest option, because you can vote from home. However, despite WV Citizens for Clean Elections' efforts to make the process consistent with the primary, for the general election registered voters in most counties won't be mailed an absentee ballot application.

As we go to press, these are your options for requesting an absentee ballot:

- Request a ballot online using the secretary of state's absentee ballot application portal. This is a welcome option for those voters who are able to use it, but many voters in WV are not able to access it or are just not comfortable using it. Those voters can do one of the following:
- Call or email your county clerk and ask them to mail an application to you; or
- Download and print an application and return it to your county clerk by mail or email.

At this point, only voters in Lincoln and Ohio counties will be mailed absentee ballot applications. But there's still time for the governor and secretary of state to get this right and order election officials to mail absentee ballot applications to all eligible voters. With the threat of COVID-19 greater than it was in June, and at a time when the U.S. Postal Service is under attack and mail delivery may be delayed, the governor also could authorize the use of drop boxes to allow voters to hand deliver their ballots without putting themselves, county clerks, and their staffs at risk.

That's where you come in.

Demand that Governor Jim Justice and Secretary of State Mac Warner protect our health and our right to vote safely by taking action on these two issues:

Mailing Absentee Ballot Applications

A county-by-county decision on this issue does not guarantee the benefit of an application to every registered voter regardless of where they live and their ability to access or use the online portal.



Absentee ballot applications should be sent to all registered voters as was done for the primary election. Contact the governor and the secretary of state and tell them that their constituents deserve to have the same chance to vote safely in November as they had in June.

Drop Boxes for Ballot Delivery

At the same time as elections officials are projecting—and seeing—an increase in the number of voters choosing to vote absentee, internal policy changes within the USPS have led to delays in mail delivery that may result in absentee ballots not being delivered on time. The secretary of state's office has determined that the use of drop boxes doesn't comply with the allowable delivery methods for absentee ballots. However, the governor could issue an executive order authorizing the use of secure drop boxes. Voters shouldn't have to rely on the postal service or go into the courthouse during working hours to make sure their absentee ballot arrives on time.

Please contact the governor and secretary of state now to ensure that our democracy can function during this pandemic.

Governor Jim Justice: (304) 558-2000 or governor@wv.gov

Secretary of State Mac Warner: (304) 558-6000 or mwarner@wvsos.gov

Want to do more to fight for a democracy that works for all of us? Get involved with OVEC's WV Citizens for Clean Elections work. Contact us at 304-522-0246 or info@ohvec.org. 🍷

Honoring Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Huntington residents gathered outside the Cabell County Courthouse on September 19 for a candlelight vigil to honor the life and legacy of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, one of the fiercest champions for civil rights ever to occupy a position within the nation's highest court, who died September 18 from complications of metastatic pancreatic cancer at her home in Washington, D.C., at the age of 87. OVEC Project Coordinator Robin Blakeman spoke at the event along with local leaders and organizers, who commented on Ginsburg's contributions as a legal, cultural, and feminist icon. Photo by Sarah Carballo.

Our Condolences to the Fox Family

OVEC extends sincere condolences to the family of Dr. Jan I. Fox, who passed away on August 15.

Jan worked at Marshall University for more than 30 years, holding several positions including senior vice president for IT/CIO. She was the daughter of longtime OVEC board member Winnie Fox (deceased). Her sister, the late Julie Fox, led student resistance to mountaintop removal during her tenure as a sociology professor at Marshall University.

All three women had a fierce passion for making the world a better place. In keeping with the Fox tradition of selfless giving, Jan's family asked that donations be made to OVEC in lieu of flowers for her funeral. They also ask that you share your memories at mykeeper.com/profile/JanFox. 🍷

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.

BLACK LIVES ARE BELOVED

Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
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**“The vote is precious.
It is almost sacred.
It is the most
powerful non-
violent tool we have
in a democracy.”**

Rep. John Lewis
1940-2020

GoVoteWV.com

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