
The Potomac Highland Steward

JANUARY 2013

SURVIVE AND SUSTAIN TODAY AND TOMORROW

As the summer derecho windstorm knocked out power all over West Virginia, and October's Hurricane Sandy superstorm upended the East Coast, the words "climate change" finally broke into the presidential campaign. Folks began asking more seriously:

- How would my household survive a disaster that overwhelmed our community?
- How can we set up our homes and communities to survive extreme weather events?
- Can we set up sustainable ways of living to cooperate with nature, rather than fight it?

As a state (some would say colony) founded on energy and raw materials, seeing so much taken at the expense of land and people, West Virginia bears a key role in the transition for humans to survive and sustain.

The power outages in July and October tested Potomac Highlanders' preparations for disasters, as individuals and communities. Old country ways suddenly seem useful again. When electric power fails, you have no well pump, (unless you have a gravity fed spring); no refrigeration (a root cellar would help somewhat), no fans or air conditioning, (although if you planned ahead you might have natural ventilation, solar heat, and shade trees) and sometimes no heat (unless you have a woodstove).

Assuming your house is not destroyed in a fire or flood, you may ride out a storm with some preparation. Disaster checklists on our website address issues like drinking water, heating and cooling, electricity, and computer security. □

ENERGY EFFICIENCY MOVING FORWARD

In the wake of the Sandy storm, engineers, policy planners, and computer geeks are asking what kind of electrical power systems, are needed to be more energy and cost efficient, give better service, and withstand natural disasters. And who is to pay for them, and how.

EFFICIENCY POTLUCKS: Energy Efficient West Virginia, sponsored by WV Citizen Actions Group, looking for people around the state to host potlucks in

January to discuss their proposed legislative initiatives for energy conservation and consumer utility rate savings. Email Stacy at stacy.eewv@gmail.com.

ALDERSON PLANS TO SAVE ENERGY: The town of Alderson in Greenbrier County is undertaking an energy efficiency plan, aiming to reduce energy use and cost by 10%

SMART AND DUMB GRIDS: The US Dept. of Energy has given small stimulus grants for "smart grid" projects which use computers to monitor electricity flowing through the wires and direct power to where it's most needed. Just to the south of the Potomac Highlands, the Rappahannock Electric Cooperative has put a project into effect. But observers of the New York disaster scene speculate that we need a "dumber, tougher grid" that is simpler and not dependent so much on centralized control. Local distribution networks also need more redundant connections, to create extra paths for power to reach homes when some lines fail.

SOLAR DELUGES THE ISLANDS: In sunny Hawaii, smart grid issues have reached a crisis. Solar panels have become affordable; householders are jumping to get credits from feeding electricity into the grid, outstripping those who are trying to calculate and manage the grid. The solutions worked out by the islands can have a bearing on solar grids everywhere.

Solar is still very little subsidized; Solyndra is a tiny scandal compared to years of fossil fuel tax breaks. In your home, solar requires up-front investment; efficiency of the products is improving and some costs are coming down. Check with our award-winning local solar maven, Mt. View Solar in Berkeley Springs, WV mtvsolar.com. □

THE NUMBER 350 CLIMATE CHANGE

Humans don't cause big storms and droughts. But weather scientists say that industrial burning of fossil fuels during the last 200 years have made weather effects worse. From the days of cave people until about 1800, our atmosphere contained about 275 parts per million of carbon dioxide—a useful amount to keep Earth warm enough for us to inhabit. When humans began to burn coal and gas and oil to produce energy

President

Paul Burke
 Jefferson County
 304-876-2227

Vice President

Kirsten Weiblen
 Hampshire County
 304-856-1305

Secretary

Donna Cook
 Grant County
 304-749-8424

Treasurer

Eric Burleyson
 Hampshire County
 304-856-1305

**Board Member
& State Liaison**

Bonni McKeown
 Kanawha County
 304-345-5383

Board Member

Andy Andryshak
 Morgan County
 304-947-5664

STEWARDS OF THE POTOMAC HIGHLANDS

We are a nonprofit 501(c)(4) citizens group addressing ways to live and work in respect and harmony with nature and people in the beautiful Potomac Highlands of West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland. We aim to strengthen citizens' efforts by sharing information and promoting networking among our neighbors. We lend our support to other groups who lobby for changes in laws and policies. Among the leadership of Stewards we have personal experience in many of the issues that we cover in this newsletter and on our website.

We Depend Solely On Your Contributions

*You can mail a check to the address below
 or donate securely online at PotomacStewards.com*

We are an advocacy group so your contribution is not tax-deductible, but whatever amount you can afford, no matter how small or large, is used 100% for our all-volunteer work to protect our Potomac Highlands.

***Stewards of the Potomac Highlands
 PO Box 455***

Wardensville, WV 26851

info@PotomacStewards.com

Help us spread the word - when you are done with this newsletter please recycle it by sharing it with a friend or neighbor.

Together we can make a difference

BLOWING IN THE WIND

It's windy on top of Appalachian mountains and, thanks to federal tax credits, wind companies have been clearing acres of forest to build sets of turbines. With renewal of the credits under debate, and evidence of bird and bat deaths mounting, West Virginia environmental groups wonder: Is the energy generated is worth the cost to taxpayers and the environment? Do the songs of birds and bug-eating talents of bats mean more to humans in the long run?

Do 400 foot towers on mountaintops even make a dent in fossil fuel use? Opponents in a continuing WV Highlands Voice dialog argue that it doesn't, even at times of peak electrical use.

There seems to be yet no objective answer: Does industrial wind power really meet the needs and save on fossil fuel and carbon emissions? Or is the industry just taking tax breaks for building big things on mountaintops and killing a lot of birds, bats and scenery for little energy benefit? □

SAVE OUR SQUIRREL

West Virginia environmental groups lost a court battle in August 2012 to keep endangered species protection for "Ginny," the Northern Virginia Flying Squirrel. The beautiful little gliding animals are a key part of the ecosystem in high spruce country. Strict endangered species laws, while focused on a certain plant or animal, help to protect the environment of a whole area. The Blackwater area, which includes the canyon, Shavers Fork River, the historic towns of Thomas and Davis, has been hit by excessive logging and development, and plans for Corridor H.

Friends of Blackwater asks flying squirrel fans to keep lobbying President Obama. They say the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Forest Service must begin at once to collect baseline data on squirrel populations, and to set aside habitat – or else Ginny faces extinction. More information is available at SaveBlackwater.org. □

350

▶ FROM PAGE 1

and goods, the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere began to rise. Now it's 392, trapping heat in the atmosphere—"the greenhouse effect."

Glaciers, a source of fresh water, are melting and disappearing. Droughts have ruined crops in the Midwestern U.S. and other fertile places. Sea levels are rising, adding to flooding by hurricanes like Sandy and Katrina. Food and water problems destabilize human societies. Major financial interests are now grabbing land from villagers in Africa and Asia—just as they have in West Virginia.

Climate scientists want us to get the CO₂ number back down to 350 parts per million this century, or Earth risks irreversible impacts, such as the melting of the Greenland ice sheet and major methane releases as permafrost melts.

How to cut CO₂? Curb fossil fuel burning. The scale of cuts and life style changes is huge. NASA's James Hansen calculates that 6% cuts in world-wide emissions per year will get us to 350 by 2100 if we also plant enough to reverse all the deforestation of the past 200 years.

A CO₂ tax rising over 20 years to \$7.40 per gallon of gas, and \$0.56 per kilowatt-hour would cut CO₂ by 6% per year by forcing us to conserve and change lifestyles. He says to distribute the money as a dividend, which would be \$3,000 per year per person. The rising tax and dividend also stimulate the economy, by encouraging people to buy items now, before the rising tax raises their cost. Bill McKibben is spreading this word internationally on the web at 350.org. □

NEW RURAL HOSPITALS LOCAL ECONOMIC NEWS

Hospitals and emergency services, both professional and volunteer, will be a key to survival and sustainability in the new era, wherever we live.

Reversing a long trend toward centralized medical care, Valley Health has built two brand-new hospital facilities in the Eastern Panhandle. Both provide acute (ER) care, as well as rehabilitation and long term (nursing home) care. Hampshire Memorial Hospital is located in Romney just behind the Food Lion, and War Memorial Hospital is in Berkeley Springs. Now you won't have to spend a whole day at the ER at Winchester Medical

Center! If you do need intensive care in a larger hospital, coordination and transportation is available between all three hospitals.

Rooms at the new hospitals are light and spacious, and War Memorial especially has lovely views of the mountains (which should be healing in itself!). Eclectic shopping and superb restaurants abound in Berkeley Springs, one of the nation's top artistic towns, after your hospital visit with a loved one there. If the MARC commuter rail line can be extended to nearby Hancock, WV, we'd have another way to get to Berkeley Springs for both hospital and recreation. □

THE PATH ZOMBIE

Remember PATH? The Potomac-Appalachian Transmission Highline was a boondoggle of a 765kV power line project proposed by American Electric Power (AEP) and Allegheny Energy, which has since been bought by First Energy (FE).

Filing in 2009 with public service commissions in West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland, energy firms expected to be rubber-stamped as usual. But hundreds of citizens in all three states signed on as "interested parties," including landowners advised by our Stewards group. This line was clearly not needed, especially with electricity use declining since the economic collapse in 2008. Critical opposition mass was reached and all three cases were finally withdrawn in early 2011. A victory for the little guy, right? An unneeded \$2.1 billion project was defeated!

Well, yes, but thanks to FERC, PATH lives on even today as a zombie, relentlessly hungry for ratepayer cash.

What's FERC? The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; it regulates the interstate transmission of energy. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 – crafted, if you remember, by Dick Cheney's energy task force in secret meetings with big energy corporations – allows FERC to provide financial incentives for large power transmission projects, guaranteeing a hefty profit on their investment even if the line is never built. The return on equity rate for PATH started off at a whopping 14.3% but in October 2011 this rate was lowered (hah!) to 12.4%. PATH continues to this day – almost two years after withdrawing their applications – to seek FERC approval for passing costs on to 51 million electric ratepayers in 13 states and DC.

As of the end of 2012 PATH has collected over \$95 million from ratepayers for PATH, and the total is

expected to climb to \$225 million before PATH is done. Fortunately for all of us 51 million consumers, two West Virginians, Keryn Newman of Shepherdstown and Alison Haverty of Chloe, have filed FERC challenges to the PATH zombie totaling \$5.7 million. They question the prudence of claimed expenses for lobbying, advertising, public relations advocacy, membership and donation expenses, as instances where PATH recovered more than they actually paid for services. FERC Ok'd part of the rate increase, but opponents won a hearing on "prudence" if negotiations fail.

FERC ordered PATH to correct its accounting mistakes and submit more details within 30 days. The citizens group Stop PATH WV, in their website, wished the Zombie PATH a Merry Christmas! StopPathWV.com. □

WV SEEN AS STRONGHOLD AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Whether you measure chemical pollution, or biological health of plants and invertebrates, clean water quality has dropped in Potomac watershed since 2009, according to the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

Still, the Potomac Highlands remain one of the most pristine areas in the U.S.

According to the Charleston Gazette on June 4, 2012, the highland forest along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains in eastern West Virginia has been identified as one of the natural strongholds in the U.S. northeast and southeastern Canada where plants and wildlife will be able withstand the growing impacts of global warming. A study, funded by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Nature Conservancy looked for landscapes with the most diverse topographies, elevation ranges, and geologies.

Natural corridors in the Potomac Highlands help plants and animals move up or down the mountains as the weather cools or warms, says Rodney Bartgis, state director of the Nature Conservancy's West Virginia office.

Cacapon-Lost River Land Trust is negotiating with landowners who want to keep their land in farm or forest to be part of this safe refuge for plants and wildlife. Landowners can sometimes receive grants and tax breaks for voluntarily deeding restrictions on development. To learn about putting an easement on your land or helping to raise funds to protect land, go to the land trust website cacapon.org. □

RAILS AND ROADS WHAT'S THE PLAN?

As re-elected President Obama pushes ahead with plans to raise the national rail network to higher speeds and more efficiency, Chuck Riecks, chair of WV Friends of the Cardinal (Amtrak's train through White Sulphur, Charleston and Huntington) has been leading the citizens' push for statewide rail planning.

Congress has voted to invest billions of tax dollars in highways and airports for years, steering people away from energy efficient travel means such as walking, bicycling, intercity trains and public transit. Intermodal systems of trains and short-haul trucks are the best way to move freight. "So now we're seeking a re-alignment of emphasis within WVDOT among transportation modes," says Riecks.

With rising gas prices, more and more people choose to ride trains and buses. For business and personal trips of fewer than 1000 miles, the trains are competitive with airlines, with less hassle. Long distance trains, such as the Cardinal and Capitol Ltd., which traverse West Virginia, hold the national network together by connecting the Northeast and Midwest.

Shorter trains carry vital issues in the Eastern Panhandle as well. Maryland has declared that West Virginia needs to help pay for MARC commuter trains from DC to Martinsburg—trains that could easily be extended over to Berkeley Springs via Hancock, WV. to serve tourism and hospital patronage. MARC parking lots are also filling up with northern Virginians avoiding daily traffic jams.

To improve the transportation network, everyone must cooperate: commercial railroads, freight shippers, major employers, schools and colleges, military bases, public railroads, road planners, bus companies, towns, tourism officials, and passengers. State rail planning would get everybody in the same room, including those from adjoining states, says Riecks.

WV Rail Authority has announced eight planning hearings around the state, including 5:30 to 7 p.m. ,Elkins Train Depot; Jan. 16 and 5:30- 7 p.m. Jan. 29 at the County Office/Dunn Building in Martinsburg. Citizens may send written comments to Cindy Butler, Director, West Virginia State Rail Authority, 120 Water Plan Drive, Moorefield, W.Va., on or before Jan. 30, 2013. Join Friends of the Cardinal Train in WV on Facebook, and join the National Association of Railroad Passengers at narprail.org. □

CORRIDOR H UPDATE: SOME BUILT, BUT STILL NOWHERE

A mid-2012 WV Dept. of Highways map shows the Elkins bypass, Forman (Grant/Hardy County line) to Moorefield, and Moorefield to Wardensville sections completed. The Forman to Bismarck and Bismarck to Davis sections are under construction, at a cost running at least \$15 million a mile. Final design is underway east of Kerens.

But on the two most controversial sections—Wardensville to the Virginia line and the Blackwater Canyon section which would split the twin towns of Davis and Thomas—final design has not begun, and construction isn't scheduled until 2027 and 2031. Friends of Blackwater Canyon has been battling in federal courts and agencies over the endangered West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel, which nests in trees and is hurt by extensive logging and the forest disruption which would follow the building of a four-lane highway. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is poised to sue if WV-DOH continues its intention of routing Corridor H through that sensitive area.

Meanwhile, the glorious new four-lane sections have, as predicted, almost no traffic. On the non-Corridor H east-west roads between Virginia and Elkins, including parts of Route 50, the highway department has built some passing lanes, which relieve drivers from getting stuck behind logging trucks. Why couldn't they have made these improvements to begin with? Corridor H is part of an outdated concept to help Appalachia by running traffic through it. □

FRACKING CRAZY!

Natural gas has been touted as “an interim fossil fuel” cleaner than coal. But now its great environmental and human costs are coming to light. Fracking shoots tons of chemicals underground at high pressure to extract the gas, leading to polluted drinking wells and disturbed surfaces. Even when landowners don't give permission, companies drill horizontally underground from neighboring land. People and livestock near gas wells have been getting sick. But the drilling companies are exempt from nearly all environmental laws.

A December 7th NPR story reported that the head of the University of Texas Energy Institute has stepped down and another professor has retired after an investigation found numerous errors and flaws in their report, funded by gas companies and slanted to favor fracking.

In West Virginia, environmental and landowner groups tried to pass legislation to regulate fracking, but ended up with only a weak law at the end of 2011. They've asked WVDEP to ban any more fracking permits, to no avail so far. More at FrackCheckWV.net.

After 70% of Virginians opposed fracking in the GW National Forest, the new draft forest plan bans most drilling. But in the Monongahela National Forest, which is almost all in West Virginia, officials declined to modify a 2006 forest plan to deal with fracking, according to the February 2012 WV Highlands Conservancy Voice.

In our Potomac Highlands, gas wells are threatening Morgan and Mineral Counties and other places. The Cacapon River folks are on top of the issue at CacaponRiver.org/index.php/marcellus-shale-fracking.

Meanwhile, insiders in the gas industry, in mid-2011, told the New York Times they were cautioning investors that the gas boom may prove to be a lot of hot air. Company data for more than 10,000 wells in three major shale gas formations raised further questions about the industry's prospects. While there's a vast amount of gas in the formations, can companies really afford to extract it?

Might it not be wise to forget the fracking, and go straight from coal and nuclear to conservation and solar and more efficient housing, town planning and transportation? □

WV-DOH BULLIES NEIGHBORS

The State of West Virginia has reinforced its bullying reputation, which it built by encouraging coal companies to tear down mountains in southern West Virginia. Neglecting bridges and safety repairs around the state, WV-DOH tears through forests and farms, building large four-lane roads to the lines of neighboring states—such as Corridor H to near Strasburg VA, and Route 9 to Charles Town. The WV-DOH Bully then dares Maryland and Virginia: “here's our traffic; whatcha gonna do now?” Maryland and Virginia have enough traffic and do not wish to become access ways for West Virginia.

With better planning, including bus and train transit in congested areas, all the states can benefit from better commerce with less traffic and pollution. In fact, West Virginia's greatest asset is its relatively undeveloped natural beauty. Access to it needs to be planned so this resource is not destroyed. □



Stewards of the Potomac Highlands
PO Box 455
Wardensville WV 26851

PotomacStewards.com

CHICKEN GREASE POWERS TRAINS

Here's an innovation for industrial recycling worth crowing about! Tyson Foods and Syntroleum have partnered 50-50 in a company called Dynamic Fuels, to run a Louisiana refinery which makes biodiesel fuel from animal fats and greases from poultry plants. Norfolk Southern uses the fuel to run trains, including the Amtrak Crescent, and finds it's actually cleaner and more efficient than petroleum oil. Shipping issues complicate plans to use the oil in more places, according to Trains Magazine, July 2012. But hey, Moorefield WV already has the South Branch Valley Railroad in the backyard of its poultry plants, so maybe it could be tried here too. Cockadoodle doo! □

VA PUBLIC-PRIVATE RAIL COOPERATION

Mike Testerman of Virginia Association of Railway Patrons varprail.org reports that commercial railroads are realizing they have public support as energy efficient movers of both people and freight. Instead of continually resisting more passenger trains on their already-busy tracks, they've begun designs to accommodate them in safety and efficiency, using the "steel interstate" (SteelInterstate.org) concept of separating rails from road crossings, and having double tracks on every main line.

Norfolk Southern is moving to set up all stations on sidings where passenger trains can pull over and board people, while freight trains continue running on the main tracks. In December 2012, the Virginia DOT cooperated with NS and CSX Railroads to bring tracks up to 79 mile per hour condition to launch a new regional train connecting Norfolk to the Northeast Corridor.

In Roanoke, instead of using the historic station which is now a museum, NS is helping set up a new rail passenger station next to the intermodal bus terminal. Of course all these improvements cost money, including long-delayed large investments of tax dollars. But if the U.S. is to serve its citizens in the 21st century, it will need energy efficient railroads like Europe, Japan, China and even parts of Africa and Asia have already been building. The responsibilities of federal, state, local government, commercial railroads, Amtrak, and private owners of stations will need to be sorted out. But at least the wheels have begun to roll. □