

The Potomac Highland Steward

May
2003

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands

www.PotomacStewards.org

PO Box 455, Wardensville WV 26851

FIGHTING WINDMILLS

How Green is Green?

Stewards oppose 200 enormous steel windmills on the tops of 14 miles of mountains from North of Dolly Sods to East of Mount Storm Lake.

It makes no sense to save mountaintops and then cover them with whirling steel.

The windmills would reach over 400 feet above ground – visible for miles – and would be lit at night for the safety of airplanes. The blades turn at up to 200 miles per hour. They actually produce very little power, and coal-based power plants are still needed as backup when the wind is too weak or too strong to run the windmills. It would take 3,000 windmills to match the power of just one coal fired plant like the one at Mt Storm, and we would still need the fossil-fueled plant as backup.

“Wind power will be part of our energy future, but we have to be smart about where and how we go about it,” says Caroline Kennedy of the national citizens group Defenders of Wildlife. “West Virginia has already paid a high environmental price for this country’s energy demands.”

This rush to build windmills is made profitable only by temporary tax breaks and the fact that consumers in other more affluent states are willing to pay a premium for what they perceive, and are being told, is “green” energy.

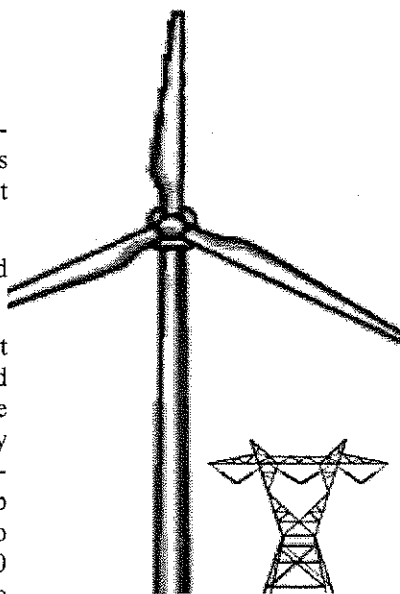
Stewards joined local and national environmental groups in opposing the project. Defenders of Wildlife and Friends of Blackwater filed a notice of intent to sue based on potential harm to the West Virginia northern flying squirrel, the endangered Virginia big-eared bat, and migratory birds. Stewards has donated to the legal battles.

A local group of landowners and farmers, Friends of the Allegheny Front, filed a protest with the WV Public Service Commission (PSC) and continue efforts to protect their land and scenic mountain viewshed. They convinced the PSC to block Dutch-owned NedPower’s plan to build turbines in the project’s southern section, because it was too close to Dolly Sods. However the PSC approved NedPower’s 200-turbine facility on top of 14 miles of the Allegheny Front.

Citizens for Responsible Wind Power called for the PSC to halt permits for wind power until the state can develop siting criteria.

West Virginia Highlands Conservancy has debated the pros and cons of wind power on the Allegheny, and decided to oppose one Guascor Group project at Rich Mountain because of severe impacts on recreational views

For more information, see www.FriendsoftheAlleghenyFront.org, PO Box 348, Maysville, WV 26833, or call Donna Cook at 304-749-8424.



**465-foot Windmill next to a
125-foot Transmission Tower**

WORKING WITH THE LAND

Finally! After years of taking potshots at organic farming in the state Agricultural Bulletin, West Virginia Agriculture Secretary Gus Douglass now says that nontraditional farming and gardening is the fastest-growing segment of the state’s \$500 million annual agriculture economy.

Nurseries and hydroponics are taking off, and West Virginia already has 400 small food processing firms, Douglass told the Charleston Gazette Feb. 4. “We’ll also be hearing a lot more about West Virginia’s organic farming in the years to come,” he said. “We’re finding that the best way farmers can survive is to get involved in direct-marketing their products.”

He cited the example of Headwater Farms West Virginia Petite Beef, a cooperative of growers in Hampshire County who direct-market their pasture-raised beef to local and mail-order customers with the help

of Gourmet Central, a small Romney packing plant. They raise the cattle without hormones and antibiotics, and fence them away from streams. The program is co-sponsored by the Extension Service and Cacapon Institute. To order your beef, see www.cacaponinstitute.org or call Neil Gillies 304-856-1385. Or call Bob Cheves, Hampshire County extension agent, 304-822-3020.

Other Hampshire County small farmers are finding some success, including our own Stewards board member Kirsten Weiblen and her husband Eric Burleyson, our webmaster. They raise milk goats, free roaming laying chickens and ducks, and sheep at their farm Riversdell on the Cacapon. Visit them at riversdell.com. We are interested in linking with more of our sustainable small farms and other eastern West Virginia “green” businesses on our website. Email Eric at webmaster@PotomacStewards.org

LEARN ABOUT NATIVE PLANTS with the Eastern Panhandle Native Plant Society. Upcoming events include a wildflower walk May 24 at Sleepy Creek State Forest. To get on the email list contact Lynn Wagner, lwagner@intrepid.net

WATERSHED STUDIES

Cacapon Institute is using the new science of microbial source tracking to try to pin down where bacteria polluting the Potomac watershed are coming from—Cattle? Poultry manure? Faulty human septic systems? Wild animals? The US Fish and Wildlife Service Final report on Water Quality Studies in the Cacapon River’s Lost and North River Watersheds in West Virginia is now available in PDF format on the lab’s website. The Institute is also sponsoring an interview series and a public questionnaire on its website to discuss the economic and environmental forces that shape the watershed’s future. Views of farmers, environmentalists, politicians, developers, business people and other residents are featured. Contact: Neil Gillies, www.CacaponInstitute.org, Rt 1 Box 326 High View, WV 26808 304-856-1385

SAVE OUR SOIL

Soil erosion was one of the earliest focuses of government and citizens' conservation efforts in the 1930s, following the careless lumbering and farming practices in the early 20th century. The problem is still with us, not only in the farm and forest, but even more so as a result of development and highway building. Anywhere vegetation is removed from soil, erosion begins.

Mud from construction, even if it doesn't contain polluting chemicals, suffocates aquatic life and fish in streams. Scientists and business people have developed practical ways of sediment control, but builders often cut corners and don't use them.

Last year Stewards took the lead in a lawsuit with West Virginia Rivers Coalition, forcing the WV Division of Highways to increase the size of sediment holding ponds along the Lost River section of Corridor H.

This year, Stewards is pushing to increase statewide erosion control standards for both private and public construction.

CORRIDOR H: THIS IS PROGRESS?

The unnatural lights atop Sandy Ridge, west of Wardensville, Hardy County, W.Va. glare into the next county. Contractors hired by the State Highway Department, with our tax dollars, are working on Corridor H, the section from Baker to Wardensville. Huge bulldozers prowled day and night, even in the dead of winter, to satisfy the cravings of politicians and poultry bigwigs and large trucking firms. They have torn apart once-majestic cliffs and forests and once-peaceful farms along Route 55 by the Lost River, in order to impose their straightened, sterile four lane road on the landscape.

Neighbors say the crews have broken a lot of drill bits on the unyielding quartzite. Tourists stare at the tower of bare earth above what used to be Lost River Sinks, the suburban-looking access turn at Sauerkraut Road, and the torn-up hill opposite Hanging Rock, and think they are seeing mountaintop removal coal mining. All this for a road far from existing towns and cities, in an area with little traffic. Cost: over \$15 million a mile. Another sacrifice to the great god of Petroleum Consumption.

The earth carnage will stop, at least for several years, in a nonsensical spot just west of Wardensville where the Section 4, Baker-to-Wardensville, ends, and the Wardensville-to-Virginia line, Section 3, begins. Virginia has so far refused to build its 14 mile section which would go to Interstate 81; it's not on the state's six-year plan. If West Virginia's money holds out, it will finish the 21 miles from Moorefield to Wardensville. The highwaymen have set their sights on building west from Moorefield next. The middle sections involving the Monongahela National Forest seem to be years away from completion. Here is what we've learned from the Jan. 31 WV Division of Highways status report, and from citizens active in each of the sections:

Elkins to Kerens 5.5 miles, was completed and open to traffic in August 2002.

Kerens to Parsons 13.5 miles, WVDOH is studying re-routes for this sections which include Corricks Ford and Shavers Fork. The Jan. 31 status report said they were to issue a Record of Decision in April—nearly two years later than they stated in 2001. They have no dates for beginning final design, right of way acquisition

or construction. Corridor H Alternatives, commenting on the final Environmental Impact Statement, noted that the completed section from Elkins to Kerens generated 2.5 times more excess excavation than the preliminary designs had indicated. If the actual land disturbance is that much greater than planned, it follows none of the environmental impact statements will turn out to be accurate, and damage is much more extensive than WVDOH said during the environmental evaluation process.

Parsons to Davis (Blackwater Canyon section) 9 miles, the. WVDOH planned to issue a final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision in the summer of 2001, and now they plan this for December 2003. They have no dates for beginning of final design and right of way acquisition, or construction. This section will be seriously challenged by environmental groups, since it runs through the Monongahela National Forest as well as the Canyon. In the minutes of the Thomas/Davis community committee in summer 2002, DOH engineers told the group that their section would be build last, in maybe nine years, and that finishing the rest of H will cost from \$3 to 6 billion.

Davis to Bismarck 16.5 miles: WVDOH issued the Record of Decision for this flat section paralleling Route 93 in March 2001. Its "estimated" dates for beginning final design are July 2001, and right of way acquisition "estimated" to begin in October 2003.

Citizens interested in monitoring and contesting the above western sections should contact Hugh Rogers, Corridor H Alternatives, at PO Box 11, Kerens WV 26276, 304-636-2662, rogers@wvhighlands.org. Contact us at Stewards of the Potomac Highlands regarding the following eastern sections:

Bismarck to Forman (Greenland Gap section) 9.5 miles, Record of Decision issued in July 2001. WVDOH says it plans to start acquiring right of way in June 2003, let contracts in August 2004, start construction September 2004, completion in Sept. 2006. Greenland Gap activists led by Debbie Kunkel, after documenting the Gap's civil war history and natural features, persuaded the highway department to move the alignment a quarter mile away from the gap, reducing noise and air pollution there and sparing several houses in the village of Greenland. A mile-long access road was also eliminated between Greenland and Route 93, and the exit will be two miles north of Scherr onto Route 93, instead of at Greenland. The revived Grant County Historical Society has helped obtain grants to restore an old school house at Scherr. Info: contact Kunkelatgap@mountain.net

Forman to Moorefield 16 miles, Record of Decision issued in July 2001. Final design was done in September 2002, right of way acquisition began July 2002. WVDOH says it plans to let bids out for contract so May 2003, begin construction June 2003, and complete it in September 2006. Citizens in this area are protesting Corridor H's bisecting of several farms and are pushing WVDOH to follow along the old Forman Road instead.

Moorefield to Baker 14 miles, are under construction, part is being used, scheduled to be completed in October 2003.

Baker to Wardensville 7 miles, under construction as described above, completion scheduled September 2004.

Wardensville to VA line 5.5 miles: WVDOH estimates the Record of Decision will be issued this year, but final design, right of way acquisition and construction are undetermined. Construction will be deferred for up to 20 years, in accordance with the agreement signed with Corridor H Alternatives in February 2000. A

rise in traffic could trigger earlier construction, so Stewards are monitoring this issue.

In that February 2000 agreement, Wardensville was promised \$1 million for capital improvements to compensate for damage from Corridor H to the town's economy. A citizens planning committee met in 2002, and had joint sessions with WVDOH, using a facilitator sponsored by Canaan Valley Institute, to determine how the town should best spend the money for sidewalks, trails, drainage and spot beautification. However, the town in a letter raised serious questions about Corridor H impacts, such as access roads to downtown; the impact on the spring that supplies town water; and impact on the town park. They want this to be part of the planning process, and WVDOH wants to put these issues off til final design. (See www.PotomacStewards.org for the letters)

Virginia line to I-81, 14 miles: Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board, as a result of citizen protest and opposition by Rep. Frank Wolf, voted in 1994 not to build this section. West Virginia's strategy is to complete its 100 miles and dump the traffic onto two-lane Route 55 at the state line, forcing the building of four lanes to connect with I-81 That's why Virginians should stay aware...and support any opposition to Corridor H in West Virginia and in Congress!

West Virginia Agriculture Secretary Gus Douglass, who in 1993 wrote a letter supporting Corridor H, now notes in a Feb. 4 Charleston Gazette article that some of the most productive farmland in the Moorefield-Petersburg area is being subdivided, mostly for vacation and retirement homes, as a result of Corridor H. He also said, "One of the greatest agricultural concerns in homeland security these days is the fact that virtually every city in the nation has less than a seven day food supply on hand. We do have some operating plans to keep the supply lines open in emergencies."

RIVERS COALITION SUES TO STOP POULTRY POLLUTION

Russia refuses to buy irradiated chicken

After three years of trying to encourage enforcement of pollution laws, West Virginia Rivers Coalition announced in February its intent to sue Pilgrim's Pride Corp. (formerly Wampler) a large Moorefield poultry processor, for polluting the South Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac. The company has frequently discharged more than 50 times the permitted limit of fecal coliform, indicating the presence of manure and other waste. The area is just upstream from the Potomac Trough, an area famous for bald eagles and prime canoeing, and many people from the area also fish in the Potomac.

The West Virginia Dept. of Environmental Protection has issued several compliance orders and fines of \$50,000 and \$21,000. Margaret Janes, senior policy analyst at the Appalachian Center, which is representing the Rivers Coalition, noted, "A \$50,000 fine is a drop in the bucket to a large corporation like Pilgrim's Pride." Jeremy Muller of the Rivers Coalition added, "There is an air of lawlessness surrounding the poultry industry in West Virginia..... is it politicians protecting their polluter friends or the DEP's inability to stop polluters? I would guess it's both."

Meanwhile, as meat inspection for safety deteriorates nationally, markets overseas are turning up their noses at U.S. meat products. According to a Charleston WV Gazette story March 19, Russia

has insisted that each slaughterhouse and processor test its products for radiation, which is being used by U.S. processors to kill bacteria in meat.

OUR GOALS

We work to preserve the open spaces, forests, farmland, rural communities, and towns, and foster stewardship of the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia, Virginia, and Maryland. To accomplish those goals, we promote ways for people to make a living in this region without destroying the quality of air, soil, water, wildlife, and scenery, and encourage community planning for sustainable economic development.

THIS IS YOUR ORGANIZATION!

Board of Directors:

Our new Directors and Officers for 2003 are:

President, Paul Burke, Shepherdstown, Jefferson County 304-876-2227
Vice Pres, Kirsten Weiblen, Yellow Spring, Hampshire Co. 304-856-1211
Secretary, Donna Cook, Maysville, Grant County, 304-749-8424
Treasurer, Francis Bode, Wardensville, Hardy County, 304-874-3188
Board Member, Andy Andryshak, Great Cacapon, Morgan Co. 304-947-5664

Webmaster, Eric Burleyson, 304-856-1211

Advisor, Bonni McKeown, 304-874-3887

We're always looking for board members and volunteers, and at the moment we are especially in need of a **newsletter writer and editor**. Please give us a call!

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands
PO Box 455, Wardensville WV 26851

Please support our work. We depend on your contributions. We are an advocacy group and lobby to protect our Potomac Highlands, so we are not tax-deductible.

An envelope is enclosed for you to send us a donation. Please make checks payable to Stewards of the Potomac Highlands.

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email address:

Any websites you want us to link to:

Talents & connections:

Areas of greatest concern:

☐ Water Quality ☐ Sustainable Farming
☐ Wind Turbines ☐ Forest Conservation
☐ Corridor H ☐ Sprawl
☐ Other:

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$500 ☐

FOREST & FARM EASEMENTS CONSERVE LAND

The beautiful rolling hills and parallel ridges and valleys of West Virginia's eastern counties, and the relatively lax land use regulations and building codes make us vulnerable to sprawl spilling over from Northern Virginia, and subject to poor quality developments.

Clint Hogbin of Berkeley County, who comes from a long line of farmers, has led efforts to create state laws and county farmland boards to preserve the disappearing farmland. Now, Clint and the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle are working on saving forests too. Federal money is available through the US Forest Service in the Forest Legacy Program to purchase conservation easements from willing forest landowners. A conservation easement allows landowners to keep on owning the land and compensates them for restrictions on development rights.

WV Division of Forestry, WV Nature Conservancy and The Conservation Fund are pondering which mountains of WV will be eligible for forest protection as Forest Legacy Areas. Clint asked area forest lovers to email the Conservation Fund and ask them to include the forests of North Mountain, Sleepy Creek Mountain, Third Hill Mountain, Back Creek Watershed, Cacapon Mountain, Cacapon River Watershed, Short Mountain, and Sideling Hill Mountain.

Action: Please send an email to wvforests@conservationfund.org and ask for these forest areas and mountains of the Eastern Panhandle to be included as a Forest Legacy Area. Public meetings

were held in March and more are planned. Contact Clint Hogbin at: crhogbin@cs.com and the Eastern Panhandle Land Trust at: Margarita.Provenzano@margarita69@peoplepc.com,

For more details on meeting locations or more information about the Forest Legacy Program Assessment of Need for the State of West Virginia contact toll free 1-866-744-2344, or visit West Virginia's Forest Legacy website at www.conservationfund.org and click on WV Forest Legacy Program. For general information on the Forest Legacy Program visit the US Forest Service's Forest Legacy website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/flp.htm>.

Meanwhile, the downstream folks at Potomac Conservancy's land trust have joined with the Cacapon-Lost River Land Trust to protect farm and forest land in the Cacapon River Watershed. So far they have worked with landowners to put conservation easements on 5000 acres. One deal saved a family a substantial amount of money in inheritance taxes. Another easement was part of a bargain sale to a conservation buyer. Another landowner, Carlton Mills in Yellow Spring, eastern Hampshire County, said he signed an easement on his 998 acres so his grandsons would have land to hunt on.

Action: Want to look into protecting your land? Contact Nancy Ailes at the Cacapon River Land Trust, 304-856-1010. See the Potomac Conservancy website at www.potomac.org. Potomac Conservancy has an office now in the downtown Winchester, VA. Mall, at 10 S. Loudoun Street. Contact Heather Richards, 540-667-3606. The office has informative pamphlets for landowners and residents about how to live and work alongside rivers and streams, and maintains a network with area groups dealing with nature and environmental issues.



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PO Box 455
Wardensville WV 26851

www.PotomacStewards.org



Bonni McKeown
1317 N. Hoyne St
Chicago, IL 60622

LINDA COOPER
CITIZENS FOR RESPONSIBLE WIND POWER

May 7, 2003

Dear Fellow Stewards,

Like everyone who lives near Backbone Mountain or has traveled to the area, you have seen the forty-four turbines that now disfigure the mountain's beautiful ridgeline. As distressing as that is, it is even more disconcerting to learn that more wind power plants—with even taller turbines—are being planned. There are currently seven proposed wind power plants, which will cover the graceful mountains that surround our West Virginia and Maryland communities with nearly 600 turbines.

These facilities have very limited capacity to generate electricity, and the power they produce is inefficient. They would not be financially viable without numerous federal and state tax subsidies. In addition, very little thought has been given to how these facilities will harm us financially, including a decline in our property values and how they effect tourism and second home development which are essential to our local economies. Our communities have sacrificed themselves to meet the country's energy demands for more than a century. It's time for us to say enough!

Since last year, Friends of the Allegheny Front and Friends of Blackwater have worked hard to prevent the construction of wind power plants in our communities. This effort has been very difficult, but we have had several successes. The wind power plant project proposed by Dominion has been abandoned. The NedPower plant in Grant County was delayed, modified to exclude the southern section, and is currently being appealed to the West Virginia Supreme Court.

In March, we formed Citizens for Responsible Wind Power. This coalition of organizations, businesses and individuals is working with environmental experts, legal professionals and public relations consultants to help people and elected officials better understand the need to develop enforceable siting criteria that will protect natural and cultural resources, scenic vistas and local economies.

Much has been done, but there is much more to do. Unfortunately, we need additional funding to help us achieve our goals. That is why we have come to you. Without your financial support—and the support of everyone who cares deeply about our mountain communities—we cannot hope to be successful. *Unless something is done now, we are going to look at these monstrous structures for the rest of our lives.*

Please dig deep and give generously. We absolutely cannot do this without the help of other folks who care deeply about our mountain terrain.

Generations of West Virginia will thank you for your efforts to protect our mountains.

Sincerely,

Linda Cooper

Ms. Cooper is a Canaan Valley native and landowner and a long-time advocate and supporter of environmental causes in WV. Most notably, she was a leader in the designation of a National Wildlife Refuge in Tucker County and the successful defeat of Allegheny Power's Davis-Power Project. The Davis-Power project was challenged for 20 years and would have flooded 7,000 acres in Canaan Valley and 500 acres in Dobbins Slashings atop Dolly Sods.

----- clip and mail -----

Yes, I want to protect our scenic view sheds and preserve our mountain communities and wildlands for future generations. I have enclosed a donation in the amount of \$ _____

(Optional)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

e-Mail _____

Mail to: P.O. Box 455, Wardensville, WV 26851

Make check payable to Stewards of the Potomac Highlands and include "CRWP" in the memo line.