

# Coal River Mountain Watch Messenger

www.crmw.net

Volume 4, Issue 3

## ACTION ALERT: We're fighting tooth and nail to save Coal River Mountain!

Join us to defend our mountain, community, and wind resources  
*By concerned Coal River Valley residents*

At Coal River Mountain Watch, we have been plunged into the struggle we've been expecting – and dreading – for years: Massey Energy has begun blasting on Coal River Mountain. Though we're working hard not to lose this battle, we definitely know that we haven't lost the war. Massey can only blast a smaller portion of the mountain, which they can mine without creating valley fills, since they have yet to apply for a valley fill anywhere on the mountain.

That's not to say we're not outraged. We're rallying to protect our mountain – and our safety and the future of permanent jobs and renewable energy! On p. 2 you can find



CRMW staffer Lorelei Scarbro and member Chuck Nelson urge Gov. Manchin to protect his state's future and stop blasting on Coal River Mountain. When Manchin claimed that finding balance is "tough" in an "extraction state," Lorelei reminded him that we are actually the Mountain State!

a list of actions that we've taken, as well as ways you can stand with us.

We kicked off our campaign with an emergency community meeting, where residents decided to write a letter to send far and wide calling for an end to the blasting on Coal River Mountain. We took the first version of the letter right into Governor Manchin's office and read it to the governor himself. Versions of the letter are now circulating as we join with community members and regional

(See **COAL RIVER MTN**, p. 2)

## A big step forward for the kids:

School Board asks for funds for a new marsh Fork Elementary!  
*By Bo Webb*

After over five years of hard fighting for a safe school for our community's children, our School Board finally took the first step toward justice for our kids. On October 13, the Raleigh County School Board formally asked the West Virginia School Building Authority to build a new school.

Ed Wiley (who marched to Washington, D.C. to raise awareness of the need for a new school for his granddaughter and her classmates), Debbie Wiley, and I attended the Raleigh County School Board meeting. We were there early.

(See **MARSH FORK**, p. 4)

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**MISSION**  
The mission of Coal River Mountain Watch is to stop the destruction of our communities and environment by mountaintop removal mining, to improve the quality of life in our area and to help rebuild sustainable communities.

and national allies to send the message to the White House and the EPA. Here is a copy of the most recent version of the letter, which spells out plainly our stakes in this struggle. We sent this version to Lisa Jackson.

"We write you to declare a state of emergency. As you read this, Coal River Mountain in Raleigh County, WV is being blasted, so that Massey Energy can extract the coal through mountaintop removal mining. The blasting not only threatens communities, but would also destroy a prime opportunity to create permanent jobs and renewable energy through ridge-top wind power.

The coal company is blasting the containing ridge of the Brushy Fork slurry impoundment, which is permitted to hold 9.8 billion gallons of toxic coal slurry and is the tallest dam in the hemisphere. The impoundment sits above a network of abandoned underground mines. Residents downstream from the dam live in fear that the blasting could cause the dam to fail and create one of the greatest industrial disasters in our nation's history. The emergency evacuation plan for the Brushy Fork sludge dam states that should it fail, a wall of water 50 feet high would hit Whitesville and result in the deaths of at least 998 people.

According to a report by a contracted hydrogeologist, as well as admissions by

Massey Energy's own engineering consultants, the pillars supporting the dam are not guaranteed to withstand the pressure of the dam – much less blasts on the containing ridge within 100 feet of the dam. As former Mining Safety and Health Administration engineer Jack Spadaro states, 'Blasting in the vicinity of a coal waste impoundment can cause problems, can cause fracturing of rock and create situations where there might be stability problems with the impoundment.'

At the same time, we as a nation also stand to lose one of our most valuable natural resources – wind power. Coal River Mountain has enough wind potential to house a 328-megawatt wind farm, which would be the largest on the east coast. Yet each blast is lowering the elevation of the ridges, reducing the existing wind speeds. The blasts turn the solid bedrock into rubble. Because stabilizing large turbines in this rubble is so costly, large turbine placement is economically prohibitive.. Each blast destroys existing potential for clean energy, permanent jobs, and diversifying and strengthening our region's economy.

We urge you to take action before it is too late. You have the power to direct your agencies and use your influence on West Virginia politicians to halt the blasting, defend the safety of your people, and preserve some of our country's most valuable

resources.

The whole world is watching. Allies, nationally and internationally, are holding up Coal River Mountain as the symbol of a government's choice to remain stuck in its old ways or build a healthy, prosperous future. At the United Nations meeting in Copenhagen in December, the most powerful leaders in the world will watch Google Earth's flyover tour of Coal River Mountain, as one of approximately 15 tours of global crisis hotspots.

The world leaders will wonder why our government is allowing out-of-state coal companies to place the lives of local residents in danger and destroy one of our region's best chances for renewable energy, stable jobs, and economic diversification. You have the power to show the whole world that the United States can blaze the way forward – choosing permanent jobs and clean energy over threatening the lives of its own residents.

Again, we urge you to halt the blasting and protect your nation's people, land, and renewable energy resources.

Signed by 44 residents of the Coal River Valley

## Thanks-giving from Coal River Mtn. Watch

In the middle of the crisis on Coal River Mountain, we actually in many ways find ourselves full of thankfulness. We're thankful for the network of friends across the country who jumped to help get word out about the blasting, and to plan for ongoing events to raise awareness about the need to save the mountain. We're thankful to everyone who flooded the White House and EPA with calls, faxes, emails, and letters. We deeply thank everyone who donated recently and sent letters and emails of support.

Most of all, we're thankful that everyone sees this story as far as bigger than just one mountain -- but instead as a powerful choice between dirty energy and endangering communities on one hand, and clean, renewable energy and permanent jobs on the other.

-- Your friends at Coal River Mtn Watch

## Fighting tooth and nail: What we've done to defend Coal River Mountain

- **Organized an emergency community meeting** when we realized blasting might begin, so that everyone could share information and develop a plan (which launched our letter campaign and visit to Governor Manchin)
- **Joined with CRMW's Fall Student Summit to deliver the community letter** to Gov. Manchin -- who left his office and, for the first time, met face-to-face with us to discuss the Coal River Wind project
- **Sent a Freedom of Information Act request** to the Office of Surface Mining, Department of Environmental Protection, and Mining Safety and Health Administration, asking for any records of safety inspections on the Brushy Fork dam and mine underneath it. Because a 2000 report by hydrogeologist Rick Eades showed that the dam and mine had safety concerns, we asked for evidence that these agencies had followed up on those concerns. We also urged them to halt blasting until they can prove 100% safety for the dam and mine.
- **Coordinated flyovers above the site**, thanks to Southwings, to monitor the mining activity with our own eyes
- **Groups such as ilovemountains.org, OVEC, and many more launched email blasts** to encourage members to contact the White House and EPA, to ask the government to save Coal River Mountain
- **Wrote petition letter** to White House with over 40 community members' signatures, as well as other organizations and luminaries
- **West Virginia Youth Action League organized** call-in/write-in day of action
- **Planning for event** related to Coal River Mountain on December 7 (stay tuned!)

## “We are real people”: *Statements from community members, written during an emergency meeting about blasting on Coal River Mountain*

To me, it's not just the impact that the mountaintop removal would have on the water and the plant life, but that this will impact us. The authorities need to know that there are people living here in this area. They need to know that the impact is not just on Ameagle, it's not just on Sycamore, it's on the whole state of West Virginia. How many mountains are they going to have to take down and how many lives are going to be disrupted before they move on?

-- Diane Hodge, Ameagle, WV

My first and main concern is for the safety of the communities that live downstream of the Brushy Fork sludge impoundment, including many of my friends and family and my birthplace and hometown, Sylvester. Again, we have an opportunity to continue to be an energy leader and keep Coal River intact, with a wind farm which has proven to be more economically viable than blowing the mountain up for coal. If we proceed with the plan for mountaintop removal mining, we destroy the wind potential. This ridge is the backbone of our community and the only mountain left intact in our area.

We can have both energy resources: underground coal and the wind, which can produce power for many, many homes. The jobs produced by mountaintop removal are temporary and provide only temporary energy. By blasting away our wind potential, we risk losing the opportunity to have jobs that would last forever.

As we face the climate crisis, we need to set an example in creating renewable energy. Therefore, the most logical option is deep mining, but leave the mountain intact for the future of Coal River and the future of our state.

Blasting within 200 feet of the sludge impoundment is dangerous for everyone 20-30 miles downstream. If the dam failed, it would be the biggest environmental disaster in the history of the United States. The

DEP's job is to protect the environment and community, and allowing Massey to blast this close jeopardizes everyone who lives downstream. It's a no-brainer not to let this permit go forward. Stop blasting!

-- Chuck Nelson, Glen Daniel, WV



*Blasting begins on the edge of the Brushy Fork sludge dam. Photo by Vivian Stockman of OVEC ([www.ohvec.org](http://www.ohvec.org)), courtesy of Southwings flyover ([www.southwings.org](http://www.southwings.org)).*

As a native West Virginian and a long-term resident of the Coal River Valley, I am very concerned about the current activity by the coal company on Coal River Mountain. My property borders Coal River Mountain, and so does many of my family, friends and neighbors. For the past 19 months we have worked very hard to save this mountain from destruction. We are supported by over 13,000 people from across this nation including many residents of this state.

-- Lorelei Scarbro, Rock Creek, WV

Why should we sacrifice Coal River Mountain for the sake of a few years of coal, if we could have wind farms forever? The destruction of our mountaintops is really an act of terrorism because the people that live in the valleys below are living in terror of the blasting, the pollution of our waters; they poison our air; they destroy the beauty of our mountains, which is what

drove people to our state.

We must stop mountaintop removal, which only produces 5% of America's electricity. Mountaintop removal not only destroys our mountains, it destroys our way of life and in the end it creates poverty.

-- Gary Anderson, Colcord, WV

**We want the coal companies to know we are real people** with lives, dreams, and hopes not only for ourselves, but for our children, grandchildren, and other people's children. We lost our home and all our personal belongings we had worked for and saved for 37 years in July 2001, and our concern with more and bigger sludge ponds being made now puts us at much more risk than ever before, even after we have built a new home and raised it more than 7 feet higher than our old home was, that we will we washed away. It seems the only thing the coal company wants is to be rid of us all and turn all our homes and land into one big landfill.

-- Mike and Lessie Maynor, Dorothy, WV

I oppose mountaintop removal in all forms. Our mountains are being removed and our valleys are being filled in by debris. The blasting of our mountains is putting of rock dust along with the blasting agents, and is poisoning our water and our air. The dust is so bad that if you wash your car, it's dirty before you get done with the job. Our community is being destroyed by Massey Coal Company in the name of energy. That is being run by *greed* from the coal company. Coal in this valley will only last about 15 more years. Then what will be left? Nothing. If the legislators want people to have jobs, then make the coal companies employ deep mining. It takes more people to deep mine than to destroy our mountains by blasting them away.

-- Emmett Withrow, Colcord, WV

## **TAKE ACTION!**

**Contact these officials to tell them to stop the blasting and preserve the mountain for renewable energy:**

- EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson: Call 202-564-4700, email [jackson.lisa@epa.gov](mailto:jackson.lisa@epa.gov)

President Obama: Fax 202-456-2461, call 202-456-1414, comment at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact>

- U.S. Dept. of the Interior Sec. Ken Salazar: Call 202-208-3100, email [feedback@ios.doi.gov](mailto:feedback@ios.doi.gov)

For a sample letter:

<http://www.ilovemountains.org/coalriver>

- Promote the Clean Water Protection Act (House) and Appalachian Restoration Act (Senate) -- more info at <http://www.ilovemountains.org/resources#federal>

## MARSH FORK (cont'd from p. 1)

Just before the meeting a slew of teachers walked in and sat behind us. My first thought was that they were there to denounce the need for a new school.

When the agenda reached the school issue, I thanked the board for their consideration to replace the school in a different location in our community. I told them that aside from the controversy with the next door mining operations it was time for a new school.

The school has old, cracked walls, at least one past issue with asbestos, and coal dust in all the class rooms. I encouraged the School Board not to be distracted by political positioning or back-pedaling by Massey, but focus on the children's welfare and our community deserving of a new school.

Debbie then spoke about the importance of providing a safe learning environment for our kids, that they are the future and deserve our best efforts to provide them with a new school.

Then the P.E. teacher from the school talked about the need for a modern school. A new school would put a new step in the students' and teachers' shoes. He went on for over five minutes until they rang the buzzer. He received a nice applause from

the teachers and us.

When the board to cast their vote to determine if they would formally ask the state School Building Authority for the funds to build a new school, three of the five members voted yes. Two members abstained. The yes decision passed 3-0.

When the meeting adjourned I went up to thank the board members for their vote and in particular board President Rick Snuffer for bringing the issue forward. Superintendent Charlotte Hutchens seemed both happy and relieved. She reminded me that this is but the first step and we have a ways to go before an actual school would be approved and built.

As we were chatting a few teachers came by to thank the board. A couple of them tapped my arm and smiled as they went by. That was in stark contrast to how some teachers acknowledged us five years ago when we began the campaign to get the kids a new school.

To understand the importance of this victory, take a look back at the past half-decade of hard work that residents and supporters have poured into the Marsh Fork Elementary campaign. Five years ago, due to expanding mountaintop removal operations surrounding the school, a few local citizens with concerns for the children's health

began a campaign to build a new school, in a new location, *in our community*.

Over time the campaign grew into a movement. We marched, we protested, we lobbied. We told our story the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and other newspapers across the country. The Pennies of Promise Campaign, a campaign to seek donations for a new school, was kicked off at the WV state capital.

Shortly after, Ed Wiley walked 400-plus miles with the Pennies of Promise Campaign Flag to Washington DC in hopes to meet with Senator Robert C Byrd to ask for his help in obtaining a new school for our children. Along the way, Ed stopped in towns, talked about the school and received donations for Pennies. He steadfastly marched, talking to anyone and everyone he met about Marsh Fork Elementary School.

So many people have contributed to the campaign that I could never name them all, but I do thank them all. We've seen over 64 arrests for peaceful civil disobedience during some of the protest. We are now at the threshold of realizing our dream. It has been well worth the effort.

*Bo Webb is a veteran and resident of Peachtree, in the Coal River Valley.*

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## Braving the Army Corps Hearings: *A group of Coal River residents spoke out at the Oct.*

*13 public hearings, in favor of the Army Corps decision to end the streamlined permitting for valley fills. This local teenage resident describes the intimidation we faced. We are currently reporting our accounts of the meeting to Charleston police and lawyers, demonstrating that our right to a safe public hearing was violated. Thanks to all the brave residents who attended the hearing!*

"Man." I thought, "Can it get any worse?" Just then, someone came over to me: "This place is getting too violent, we need to get out of here." I suppose I need to give a little background to this dialogue. I was at the Charleston Civic Center. We were sitting into a public hearing on Nationwide Permit 21; the Army Corps of Engineers had decided to do away with the streamlined permitting process abused by the coal barons. They were going to implement a system in which every single permit would be evaluated on an individual basis, on their own merits. But, of course the coal industry would not stand idly by as they are rightfully regulated by the agencies that are supposed to regulate them.

Oh no, they had to rally their troops. On the way to the hearing, I figured it would just be an uneventful bureaucratic formality, but oh was I wrong. As we neared the Civic Center, I could hear the blaring of an air horn, and I knew it was from a coal

truck. As I looked out into the crowd, I was stricken with pure unbridled terror. It was a sea of coal miners in their uniforms, waving signs. As we walked through the crowd I was on edge, ready at any time to make a dash for it if need be. "We're busing people up to Pennsylvania for another hearing like this, we can't let the crazies win" a woman told me "Unless you're one of those crazies."

As the whole show got underway, the first speaker, WV Senator Truman Chafin, approached the microphone, "I think God has a purpose for every creature on earth" the man said. "But, mosquitoes and the EPA are two exceptions to that rule!" Every speaker after that man followed the same pattern, up until a brave woman from the environmentalist side decided to speak. "Turn around and face us!" someone shouted from the crowd. The woman kept trying to speak, but was promptly interrupted by shouts.

This is where it started to get truly nasty, and the people in charge were doing nothing to stop, and in some instances fueling the shouting. After about an hour and a half of sitting through this abuse, we decided to leave. We ducked insults the entire way out. When we were outside, we seen there were no police around to protect us, and there are no words to explain the fear that I felt.

But somehow I made it out, and we all survived, all limbs intact. Moral of the story? We need to educate the coal miners and their families, and we need to make them understand we aren't against them, and not out to make them unemployed, but to protect our state for future generations.

*The author is a 19-year-old resident of the Coal River Valley who once attended Marsh Fork Elementary.*

# AGENCY ROUND-UP:

## Updates from the mountaintop removal regulators



Left to right: EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Assistant Secretary of the Army Corps of Engineers Jo-Ellen Darcy, Secretary of the Dept. of the Interior Ken Salazar, and new director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement Joseph Pizarchik

**EPA objects to 79 mountaintop removal permits!** While it's far from a complete victory, this "temporary stay of execution" is the best action we've seen from the EPA yet. The Army Corps was set to approve these permits, but the EPA decided that all 79 would violate the Clean Water Act. The EPA and Army Corps will have 60 days to discuss next steps. You can find an interactive map of the permits online: <http://www.ilovemountains.org/epa-permit-list/>.

**First real veto of an Army Corps permit?** The EPA seemed poised to override the Army Corps of Engineers and veto the Spruce No. 1 – the largest mountaintop removal permit in WV. However, the EPA decided to extend the process, to negotiate more with the Army Corps. The court proceedings will not begin until Dec. 4.

**EPA works to save other permits:** The EPA negotiated with the enormous (and,

usually, union) Hobet mine to reduce their environmental impacts while allowing mine expansion. The EPA also approved the contentious Peg Fork permit, to which it had originally objected. This Mingo County mine would violate both the Surface Mining Act and the Clean Water Act, but the EPA approved it after the mining company (CONSOL Energy) reduced the number of valley fills.

**Dept. of Interior: Falling back on its promise:** The Dept. of the Interior is waffling on its commitment to restore the Stream Buffer Zone rule that had originally banned dumping mining waste within 100 feet of a stream. As part of an "unprecedented" effort to rein in mountaintop removal, the Dept. of the Interior had announced that it would renew the rule, which the Bush Administration had weakened. Yet now the Dept. of the Interior announced that it will delay the rule-making – with no definitive action before 2011!

**New director with a bad rep:** Joseph Pizarchik has been confirmed as director of the OSMRE – a terrible choice, according to the Pennsylvania environmental groups who dealt with him when Pizarchik was director of the PA Bureau of Mining and Reclamation, part of the state DEP. These groups issued numerous public statements against Pizarchik, especially focused on his support of coal ash dumping.

**West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection under attack:** Not only did a WVDEP staffer Doug Wood issue a memo accusing Sec. Randy Huffman of ignoring staff reports and misleading Congress about the problems with valley fills, but the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement issued a yearly report of numerous serious flaws in the DEP's mining regulation. More details: <http://blogs.wvgazette.com/coalatattoo/?s=osm+dep>.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**November 14-20:** Watch Coal Country on Planet Green, and listen to the stories of many of our friends: CRMW co-director Judy Bonds, Board members Mary Miller and Pauline Canterberry, tireless member Chuck Nelson, and residents of Prenter fighting for clean water.

- Nov. 14: 8 p.m. ET.
- Nov. 15: 12 p.m. ET.
- November 19: 11 p.m. ET.
- November 20: 3 p.m. ET.

Coal Country reveals the truth about modern coal mining, through stories told by the people directly involved, both working miners and activists who are battling the coal companies in Appalachia. The movie explores what these stories mean for America and the rest of the world? The coal industry is spending millions to promote what it calls "clean coal." Is it achievable? At what cost? For more information, visit [www.coalcountrythemovie.com](http://www.coalcountrythemovie.com).

**November 30:** The Mobilization for Climate Justice invites communities, organizations and activists across North America to join in organizing mass action on climate change on November 30, 2009 (N30). N30 is significant because it both immediately precedes the upcoming UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen (COP-15) and is the ten-year anniversary of the successful shut down of the WTO in Seattle, when activists worldwide came together to demonstrate the power of collective action.

We welcome the active involvement of organizations that are united with us in our opposition to market-based false solutions to climate change, and in support of real, effective and just solutions to climate change.

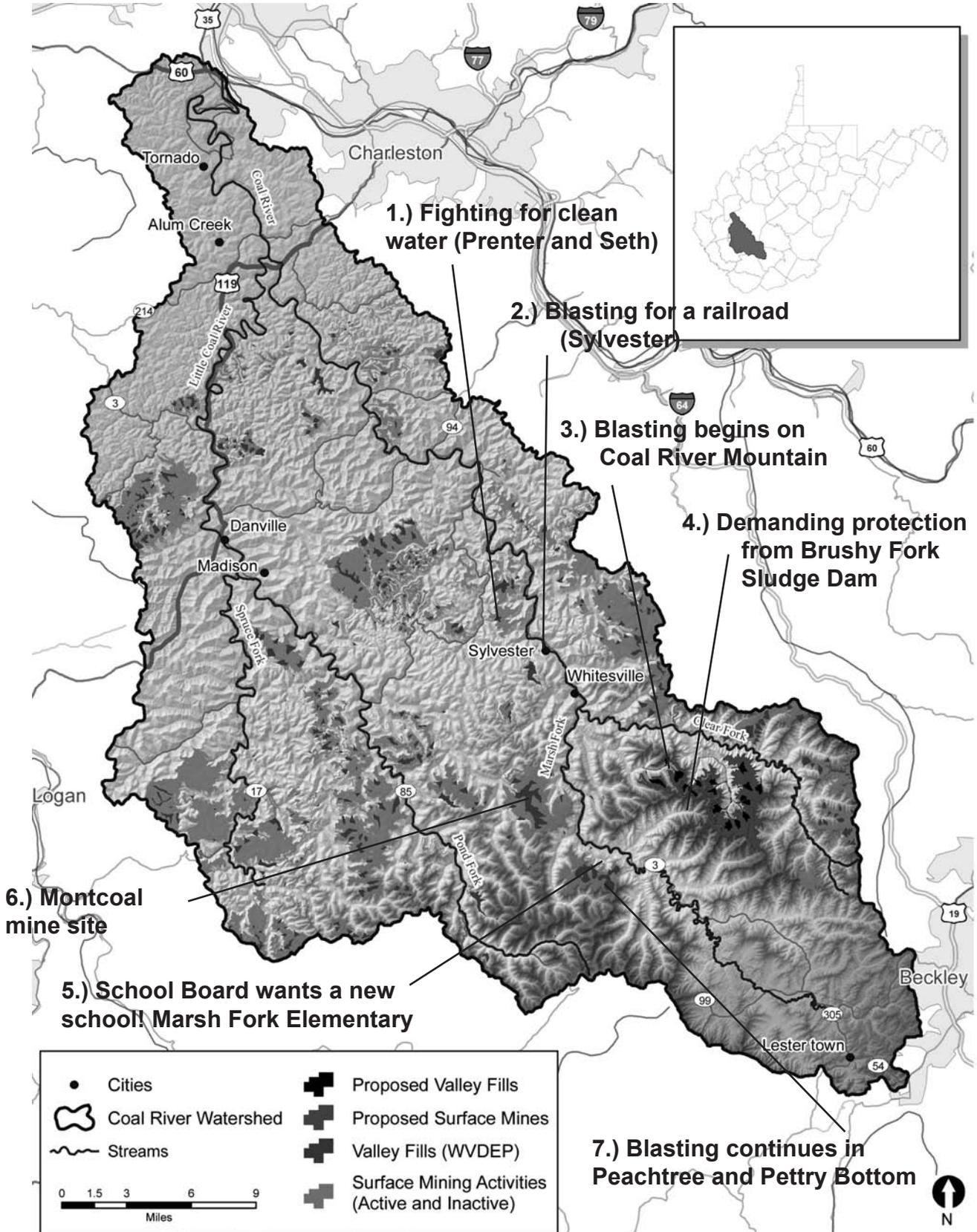
For more information on getting actively involved with the MCJ, please contact: [infoclimate09-NA@riseup.net](mailto:infoclimate09-NA@riseup.net) or go to <http://www.actforclimatejustice.org>

**December 7:** Keep your calendar free and your ears tuned for more information about celebrating D-Day by rallying for victory to defend Coal River Mountain.

# Bird's Eye News

A View of the Latest from the Coal River Valley Watershed

MANY thanks to Fritz Boettner of Downstream Strategies and Jen Osha for this beautiful map!



# What's Happening Where? *A Key to the Map*

## 1.) Fighting for clean water (Prenter and Seth)

- At long last, waterline construction begins at the end of August, for residents whose well water was poisoned by underground slurry injection
- Prenter's struggles with coal-contaminated water make the front page of *The New York Times*, shocking the nation that even in America, citizens do not have access to safe drinking water
- Prenter resident Jennifer Massey appears on Oprah's "Dr. Oz" show to tell her story about organizing for clean water.

## 2.) Blasting for a railroad (Sylvester)

- Residents contact the local newspaper to publicize their complaints about the dust, noise, and flyrock from the blasting on the ridge beside the town. Blasts continue leveling the ridge order to build a second railroad track for coal trains.

## 3.) Blasting begins Coal River Mountain

- Blasting begins on the Bee Tree permit area, where Massey can mine without needing any 404 valley fill permits. See pp. 1-3 for our stories.
- Massey applies for a new permit -- Slip Ridge, 59 acres of surface mining without a valley fill, next to an old strip site -- CRMW is requesting site visits and a public hearing
- Massey applies for another boundary revision to the Bee Tree permit -- another box cut, to make it easier to haul overburden
- Surface mine NPDES permits still not approved for Bee Tree, Eagle 2 but not Eagle 3 or Collins Fork.
- Still no valley fill permits: Massey has still not applied for valley fill permits for any of the mines. fill permit. We lost our appeal before the Surface Mine Board.
- **Permit numbers: Bee Tree S301004, Eagle 2 S302805, Collins Fork S300208, Slip Ridge S300809**

## 4.) Brushy Fork Dam and Marfork Preparation Plant

- CRMW reviews a 2000 study by hydrogeologist Rick Eades, which points out the regulatory agencies' failure to ensure the safety of the dam. CRMW urges agencies

to review their safety records -- and halt all blasting until the dam and underground mine beneath are proven safe without a doubt. See more details, p. 2.

(Prep plant feeds impoundment permitted for 9 billion gallons (largest in the country). The sludge sits above a maze of underground mines, and Massey plans to blast with a few hundred feet of the impoundment, on a ridge also mined in several seams beneath the slurry elevation)

- **Permit numbers: Brushy Fork O301095, Marfork plant O302493**

## 5.) Marsh Fork Elementary

- Raleigh County School Board votes to ask state School Building Authority for funds to build a new, safe school in the community! See story p. 1.

- Our Congressional Senators Byrd and Rockefeller and even Rep. Rahall weigh in that the kids deserve a new school!

- Concrete poured for construction of second coal silo next to the school.

- **Permit number: O001885**

## 6.) Montcoal mine: Upper Big Branch #1, Independence Energy

- Last violation Dec. for overflow sediment ditch -- 31 violations since 2002, 7 in 2008 alone

- **Permit number: S301999**

## 7.) Blasting continues in Peachtree and Pettry Bottom

- Google Earth film crew visits Pettry Bottom to interview local residents about the effects of blasting.

- CRMW continues working with residents to document and report blasts and blasting damage, and to put together a nuisance lawsuit. Call (304) 854-2182 for more info.

- **Permit numbers: Edwight mine S301299, Powellton Shumate S301100**

**CHECK ON PERMITS at [www.wvdep.org](http://www.wvdep.org) (under the tab, "E-DEP")**

Thanks to a grant from the WV Humanities Council, we're teaming up with the nonprofit Aurora Lights to expand the Journey Up Coal River website with a participatory map of the visions, plans, skills, and tools of residents in the Coal River Valley. We'll be using the map to spark dialogue about the community's future, as well as contribute to an environmental education curriculum for regional high schools and colleges.

Our year-end review in December will describe some of the exciting community initiatives that the listening projects have already sparked, such as a wood kiln, community meeting space, a series of traditional skills workshops with the local high school, and an old-fashioned gristmill. Stay tuned for more!

## Mapping a Sustainable Coal River Valley

Even as blasting begins on Coal River Mountain, we remain determined to take real steps to rebuild sustainable communities. We've launched a new project: SEED, short for Sustainable Economic and Energy Diversification. We're laying a strong foundation for our work through listening projects: interviews with community members about what they'd like to see in the area and what skills and tools they have to offer.

# REMEMBERING THE PAST, WORKING FOR THE FUTURE

An important part of Coal River Mountain Watch's mission is to rebuild sustainable communities. We believe in honoring our rich heritage of connection to the land and sense community, to guide us as we work together for a truly healthy future. In each issue, the Coal River Mountain Watch Messenger will piece together memories, stories, and dreams for the future of our mountain home.

## THE SEASONAL ROUND: DIGGING GINSENG

*When September hits, the Coal River Valley's seasoned ginsengers take to the hills with their hoes. Often called "the prettiest plant in the woods," the increasingly-rare ginseng is a valuable find. Ginsengers comb the steep slopes for the distinctive, graceful leaves (which turn bright yellow nearer the end of the month) and spray of red berries, then dig up the roots. Though market prices vary year to year, ginsenger dealers pay good money to buy the dried roots to sell to China. This year dealers bought dried ginseng at \$400 a pound!*

## A Lifetime of Ginsenging

*From an interview with Delbert Gunnoe*

Back in the '70s and '80s, ginsenging was how I financed all my hunting trips, all my guns, often Christmas gifts. When I was young, with my grandfather, we would park at the old high school and walk all the way up into the Ellis Creek and cross over into the fork of the Birch [Hollow]. We would camp as high as three days and ginseng.

My grandpa taught me – just taking me out and showing it to me. The first time I went I was probably no more than 13 years old.

The color – you can spot it as far as you can see the yellow; it's distinctive. Once you learn it, there's nothing else that looks like it. I once found one close to 3 feet in height. One root was almost 13 ounces. It dries generally 3-1 [the dried root is a third the weight]. I found a little over 7 pounds one year.

When I first started digging it, you got a little over \$12 a pound. Really about the early '80s it started selling decent.



*Elmer May of Horse Creek displays the nearly 15 lbs (roughly 45 lbs originally), which he collected over the past two years. Elmer is known for his knack of finding especially large 'seng. (Photo by Kenny Cottrell)*

The younger people are not into it... eight to ten years ago, if you walked up and down Rte 3, you'd have found a dozen people with a ginseng hoe, and this year I didn't see the first person.

I always leave the seed – the berry – and try not to dig no 2-prongs or 3-leavers. If I find a whole bunch of 3- or 4-prongs, and a whole lot of 2-prongs, I'll cut off the leaves so no

(See **GINSENG**, p. 9)

## Ginseng versus MTR

*By Billy Pyles*

I walk through the mountains, the cove and the drain,  
What I observe causes me to compose a terribly sad mournful ditty.  
I observe a stalk of wild ginseng, one of the rare ones that remain,  
The total destruction of all this life by MTR is completely without pity.

I observe it everywhere as I continue on my walk,  
Death soon for all these living things, anyone that observes can tell.  
All of nature whispers of death, listen in your soul and you can understand its talk,  
When I put my hand to the rough bark of an oak tree,  
I hear death comes to me as well.

MTR, the quest for massive profits gives off such a stench of malice that it reeks,  
For them it's naught but a trade, living green for small pieces of paper dyed green.  
The people who are behind this MTR do not care that the mountain speaks,  
They just want to rip its top off, leaving flat rock absolutely clean.

So much habitat for the living so utterly destroyed,  
A wild ginseng plant on a flat MTR site will never grow.  
MTR: other methods of mining must be instead employed,  
Listen to the mountain talk; nature is letting all know.

I ask you all: to the living, is it right or fair,  
To kill all the living things, from the common to the very rare.  
To rend the living's habitat all the way down to flat bare,  
For immense amounts of green paper,  
which only a few will share?

# Endangered Landmark:

## Pond Knob on Coal River Mountain

By Rick Bradford and writers with Aurora Lights

Coal River Mountain, now on Massey's chopping board, is teeming with stories. Pond Knob, near Rock Creek and Dry Creek, holds historical and cultural significance stretching from Native American history to a 1950s plane crash to arrowhead-hunters today. While Pond Knob's historical significance earned it designation as a protected area safe from mining, Massey does plan to mine all around it, virtually cutting it off to the people who have enjoyed it for generations.

Here we share two descriptions of Pond Knob's significance.

*From Journey Up Coal River, an interactive mapping project from Aurora Lights that combines music, audio, photography and the written word to tell the story of the Coal River Valley (www.journeyupcoalriver.org)*

Pond Knob is a mountain summit in Raleigh County...It is named after the natural pond that sits near the top of the mountain. Pond Knob...was a popular destination for camping, four-wheeling and community meeting places because of its natural beauty.

"Used to be a big thing, everyone would go up to Pond Knob and get together the first week of April. Main reason was to hunt for Indian artifacts and ramps," says Kenny Cottrell, a resident of Horse Creek.

Pond Knob also has a deep historical and cultural significance for Coal River Valley. A Native American hunting trail passed through Indian Gap on Pond Knob, and the remains of these hunting parties can be found in arrowheads and burial mounds on the mountain.

Ernie Thompson attests to the presence of Native American burial mounds on Pond Knob: "up on pond knob there was a big natural pond up there, big Indian camp." Ernie continues on to point out the destruction of Appalachian history by mountaintop removal coal mining, stating "they're taking our history away. People buried back there... there's a lot of Indians buried back there cause I've seen the mounds...That's not right."

### **GINSENG** (cont'd from p. 8)

one else gets them. I always try to make sure I replant the seed – a lot of people just drop 'em around or take the seeds with them, but I always cover them.

When I'm out there [ginsenging], I don't have a care in the world. I'll start up in a

*From Rick Bradford:*

Over 51 years have passed since September 51, 1958 when a C-45 Army plane based at Bakalar Air Force Base in Columbus, Indiana, crashed into the Pond Knob, a rugged 3250 foot edifice at the head of Dry Creek, Rock, Creek, and Sycamore Creek on Coal River Mountain. Four people were on board – Major George A. Smith and Captain Edward H. Holcamp, United States Army; and William and Marjorie Hamilton from Huntington. The plane was returning from Bluefield where the Air Force had conducted a two-day air search and rescue training exercise.

The plane, piloted by Captain Holcamp, hit the tops of the trees near the summit of the mountain above a 100-foot highwall. There was only one access route.

The three men died instantly, but Mrs. Hamilton lived at least 24 hours after the crash, according to Dr. S.A. Ford, county coroner. She had even managed to bandage one of her broken arms and was trying to bandage her crushed left leg when she died from shock induced by loss of blood.

Jack Denny, a Rock Creek resident, had seen a low-flying plane headed northeasterly toward the Pond on Sunday, September 7. Norman Price, Pete Toney, and Buster Burnside found the wrecked plan on Saturday, September 13, after a week's search.

The story told at the time of the tragedy was that the woman had crawled some dis-

holler or swag, and if I find a stalk or two, I'll start going back and forth and working my way up the mountain. I like areas that's got a lot of grapevines – anywhere that a lot of birds nest or roost or set – because the eat they seeds. The rougher the place, the better the 'seng.



*Many local residents have summited Pond Knob to hunt for relics of the crash, like the one above. Photo courtesy of Rick Bradford.*

tance from the burned fuselage but could get no further because of the steep drop from the butchered mountain.

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton's bodies were lowered over the highwall and removed on Sunday but orders were given by the Air Force to leave the two Army officers' bodies in the plane wreckage. Their bodies were carried out of the woods on Monday by an Air Force rescue team and by volunteer fireman from Whitesville.

The volunteer fireman had to return to the scene of the wreck again to rescue Dexter Doss, who had attempted to scale the highwall instead of walking the mountain path to the wreckage. He became stuck after he had climbed about 75 feet. (Dexter Doss was killed several months later in an accidental electrocution at Edwight.)

Bits and pieces of the plane can still be found. But it won't be much longer until another leaf in our history book will be lost because A.T. Massey's gigantic mountaintop strip mine is poised to destroy everything in its path.

*Rick Bradford is from Hazy and now lives in Edwight. He taught history to schoolchildren in the Valley for over 30 years. He is now publishing his third book about the Coal River Valley's history. His two previous books, Edwight: Near the Mouth of Hazy and Coal River Valley Through My Lens use stories and photographs to make the past come alive again and honor the land, people, and places of the Coal River Valley.*

*Delbert Gunnoe lives in Rock Creek, at the base of Coal River Mountain. He is a former underground miner and still works at his own sawmill, with a bulldozer, and doing plenty haying. His hobbies include wood-working and running the bear dogs with his daughter.*

# Mountain Inspiration

*The inspiration keeps pouring out, as the beauty of the mountains and the outrage at the destruction move local residents to put the pen to the paper. These pieces warn about mountaintop removal's threat to the Coal River Valley, while challenging residents to take action to change the course of the destruction. We welcome poetry and prose submissions from any residents of the Coal River Valley or members of Coal River Mountain Watch!*

## A Dirge for Coal River Citizens

*By Billy Pyles*

Every time I leave the home that keeps my vision confined,  
I see the mountains, the coal concerns blow to the people's  
lives and future they have wrought.

I am forced to look upon the mountains that the Coal River  
citizens and I love; we all shed tears at their decline,  
I am convinced the coal concerns know this, in their single-  
mindedness, they don't give it serious thought.

Not to Coal River citizens future has a single consideration  
been given,  
Our mountains are being destroyed, made useless, for mile  
upon mile.  
Yes, our souls, our heritage, our future, from us has it been  
given,  
Everything we hold so near and dear to us the coal concerns  
continually defile.

The coal concerns move implacably on  
destroying the mountains thin and thick,  
The psychological process to fool the people they use is ap-  
parent to quite a few.  
Oh, god, how can we convince coal concerns that Coal  
River citizens are getting sick,  
About your plan for total devastation, that is something  
about which we knew.

So, just how many years of existence do  
Coal River citizens have left?  
The time, I sense that in a generation, perhaps two, it draws  
near.  
Contemplating the mountains around me, I mourn the years  
that have already been reft,  
Far too soon, of the Coal River Valley and its citizens, the  
only thing left will be only old stories you hear.

*Billy Pyles is a prolific poet and prose-writer, who lives at Girl Scout Camp, on the Coal River. He is also a lover of the woods and experienced ginseng hunter who once hiked the Appalachian Trail.*

## Stepping Stones

*By Billy Pyles*

What do you think it feels like to all my people,  
When King Coal uses them in so many ways.  
Their heads King Coal uses as stepping  
stones to get to the top of the coal steeple,  
King Coal states that's the only way he can put my people into  
play.

Yes, heads as stepping stones in his Chinese stairs to climb  
higher and higher,  
King Coal wants to step into space a god at last, King Coal  
does not want to wait until later.  
Now it is the heads of our nation's people,  
King Coal wants to use as stepping stones  
since he got China as a buyer,  
Our greatest economic enemy who wants  
to use our coal to destroy us, I call this being a traitor.

Our nation has only a relatively few years of a coal supply left,  
For a profit from China King Coal will force his way ahead to  
the very end.  
The United States, our nation, King Coal is going to leave  
bereft,  
Pray tell me, how the damage to all King Coal is going to  
amend.

King Coal will put coal out of the energy race,  
King Coal thinks he has people by the throat.  
At an ever-accelerating kill-everyone-in-the-way pace,  
Instead of coal, King Coal and court should be on that slow  
boat.

Of quantities of this natural resource left there is no debate,  
There is only so much, there will never be more.  
It is disappearing at such a great rate,  
My people resent being used as King Coal's stepping stone's to  
our very core.

Our people fought once to free ourselves from one tyrant king  
who used us as stepping stones,  
Our government is helping replace that king with yet another.  
Of our people there will not be left even the bones,  
For the love of profit illegal allograft  
King Coal will not let its conscience be a bother.

# The Existence of Mankind

By a resident of Horse Creek, WV

The existence of mankind depends on a lot of things, but the one thing that Man will cease to exist without is the ability to reclaim his or her self from today's society, for at least some period of time.

We live such a fast-paced and demanding lifestyle in today's world. Without a doubt, the dependence on a way to escape from its persistent pressure is a must. Some people seek an ocean beach to find solitude. But how many beaches still exist with solitude? Most are packed from one end to the other with so many people and so much noise that you can barely hear the water. If you are rich you may own your own beach and arrive at solitude.

Most people are not rich and must use another source to arrive at seclusion.

This is where the important part of this essay begins. The wilderness and the forests will exist without man but the ability for Mankind to exist without the wilderness and forests is impossible! So much dependence is put upon our forests and wilderness areas today, that some will cease to exist in the future. They simply cannot exist if we insist on treating them in the manner we are now doing.

By stripping the land for coal, but cutting timber without any type of regulations, by destroying the natural water supply, we are dooming not only our forests and wilderness, but ourselves as well.

Our forefathers realized the importance of our forests and wilderness areas and treated them with respect. As our lands became more populated, each generation thought only of the profits to be made from our lands, and faster and cheaper ways to achieve those profits. Somewhere along the way, they forgot the importance of the land's very existence and the impact it would have on future gen-

erations.

Our lands are being depleted of so many of its natural resources, that eventually Mankind on Earth will cease to exist. But even now, it is not too late if everyone would wake up. If we realized we have alternative methods to create power, without destroying the wilderness, forests, and the water. If we realize that mankind will ultimately cease to exist. (Wilderness would survive without Mankind, but Mankind will not survive without the wilderness, the forests, the water, and all of the natural beauty and resources we are taking away). We are destroying our own lands and leaving nothing for the future generations to come.

Do we want to be remembered as those who destroyed the Earth or as those who saved it?

*The author lives on Horse Creek, at the base of Coal River Mountain. Now retired, he worked for years in the coal mines.*



## AMPLIFY YOUR VOICE!

Become a member or renew your membership today!

Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW) is a grassroots organization working to preserve the communities in the mountains of southern West Virginia. Our mission is to stop the destruction of our communities and the environment caused by mountaintop removal mining, to improve the quality of life in our communities, and to help rebuild sustainable communities. CRMW works to empower local residents to work together to fight the effects of irresponsible mining techniques. While we honor the tradition of coal mining in this state, it is our position that mountaintop removal is destructive to our homes and to our mountain heritage, and must be halted. Our goals include advancing economic diversity and increasing public safety. CRMW welcomes members who support our mission and goals. CRMW does not discriminate against any person on the basis of race, gender, age, religion, physical ability, or sexual orientation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Friend \_\_\_\$10 Defender \_\_\_\$25 Champion \_\_\_\$50 Warrior \_\_\_\$100 Other \$\_\_\_



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