



# WEST VIRGINIA RIVERS

April 2021

Dear Friend of WV Rivers,

I first became acquainted with West Virginia Rivers Coalition over 20 years ago at a rally against mountain top removal mining at the Capitol in Charleston. West Virginians gathering together to speak out made a powerful imprint on my mind that day. **Today, just as then, it's the power of people that protects West Virginia's rivers and streams.**

All these years later, I am so proud to be working with WV Rivers. The 2021 regular session of the West Virginia Legislature just wrapped up. Our Science Fund, as you know, allows us to provide the most up-to-date scientific information to legislators — and this year our Science Fund had to work overtime!

## **Will you commit to WV Rivers clean water mission by making a tax-deductible donation to replenish our Science Fund?**

Let me tell you how our Science Fund helped win the day for clean water already this year. The odds were stacked against us; the oil and gas industry thought they could make a quick go of exempting their waste storage tanks from the Aboveground Storage Tank Act. Their lobbyists misrepresented the science – saying the contents of those tanks weren't harmful. **Your support helped us bring the irrefutable scientific facts to the policy debate.**

The Science Fund helped present our fact sheets to every legislator, explaining why these tanks are dangerous to our drinking water. The oil and gas industry's arguments were rightfully discredited and disarmed. Ultimately the bill, HB 2598, failed to advance in the Senate because of our aggressive campaign to refute industry's false claims. **We won!**

During this legislative session, we were also consumed with opposing efforts to weaken water quality standards that would allow more toxic chemicals in our rivers. The bill the Legislature passed did weaken some standards, and it directed the WVDEP to convene a workgroup to recommend what should happen for the remaining outdated water quality standards, with WV Rivers having a seat at the table.

This means we're not done. We need to beef up the Science Fund to support the hundreds of hours of analysis of the methodology and implications of proposed revisions to provide strong policy recommendations.

\*\*\*Page 1 of 4\*\*\*

*Conserving and Restoring West Virginia's Exceptional Rivers and Streams*

3501 MACCORKLE AVENUE SE #129 CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA 25304 • 304-637-7201 • WWW.WVRIVERS.ORG

## **Can we count on you to enable us to have a solid seat at the table when it comes to decisions about limiting toxins in our water supplies?**

Beyond the nitty gritty of policy there was an overarching goal – to keep your voice and your participation front and center. Because of the pandemic, the Legislature made changes limiting public access and engagement. These rules set barriers to citizen advocacy and public transparency that we had to find ways to overcome.

Joining with our allied partners we fought hard to bring your voice in to the legislative process. **Your support made that happen!**

When the House of Delegates wouldn't provide a platform for a public hearing on the proposed rollback of the Aboveground Storage Tank Act, we took matters into our own hands and led a coalition of community advocates in hosting a virtual People's Public Hearing. A hundred people showed up to support our vision for clean, safe water. We shared a recording of the hearing with the Legislature.

More people-power coupled with our science-based policy analysis came to bear. Our weekly policy update email reached over **6,800** people, and encouraged actions to engage in citizen advocacy. Indeed, it was the voice of citizen advocates like yourself who made the difference — **48,969** messages were sent to legislators in support of our priorities during this session. One Delegate commented that he heard from his constituents more this session than any other, and that many of them communicated about the importance of clean water. **Your support made that happen by enabling us to deploy a new digital advocacy tools to connect citizen activists directly to decision-makers.**

Our work did not go unnoticed in the press. We caught their attention in a big way. WV Rivers' policy work was covered over 30 times by the media during the 60-day session! **Your support made that happen, by funding our technical policy analysis and public education campaigns. WV Rivers was in the media so much because we are the organization leading this essential work.**

***If you care about the work of WV Rivers,  
please join us today with a tax-deductible donation.***

While some of our priorities faced uphill challenges in Charleston, we should all take a moment to celebrate a major feat. In the final hours of the session, a bill proposing a change in the Aboveground Storage Tank Act did not muster enough support to move from the

Senate Judiciary Committee to the Senate floor. This means over 880 oil and gas storage tanks will remain under protection and enhanced oversight. Persistent, passionate voices of citizen activists make a difference. **You made this victory happen!**

Your support of WV Rivers and our Science Fund helped decision-makers in Charleston have the best available science at their fingertips, and empowered us to speak for you as your voice in public policy. **Will you consider increasing our ability to have scientifically-based policy at the forefront of the fight for clean water and healthy communities?**

As you can imagine, it was a difficult and intense 60 days during this year's legislative session. Executive Director Angie Rosser talked with legislators daily, met with committee chairs, negotiated with agency heads, prepared expert testimony, kept the media apprised, and worked the Capitol hallways — sometimes outnumbered by industry lobbyists 20–1. Autumn Crowe, our staff scientist, provided the day-to-day technical support. Operations Manager Kathleen Tyner made sure you got the latest to-the-minute updates and alerts.

Our work doesn't end when the gavel comes down, however. We continue to work in communities to support water quality, making our rivers and streams safe for residents and visitors alike.

Now that the legislative session is over, we need to replenish our Science Fund to keep up with the year-round demands of our citizen oversight and policy advisory programming. We can't relax, or we'll lose traction. We need to continue to be in the room holding industry and agencies accountable in WVDEP's Human Health Criteria Workgroup and upcoming rule-making and public comment processes.

And we need to be leaders in the action on the federal policy front as well. We're having nearly weekly contacts with our U.S. Representatives and Senators as Congress debates issues around water, climate, energy and infrastructure that are so relevant to West Virginia. **Your support is essential to helping us keep up with it all!**

You might be asking yourself: **How can I help?**

**Here are some easy ways to support the work of WV Rivers:**

\*You can return a check in the enclosed envelope.

\*You can give a secure gift online on our website – [WVrivers.org](http://WVrivers.org) - and click the Donate button.

- \*You can become a Paddling Partner by becoming a monthly donor.
- \*You can give the gift of WV Rivers membership to someone you know will be excited to be introduced to our work for healthy rivers.
- \*You can include WV Rivers in your estate planning. Contact me at [cpritchett@wvrivers.org](mailto:cpritchett@wvrivers.org) for more information.

**Thank you!** All of West Virginia's exceptional rivers and streams are counting on all of us to be their voice on the local, state, and national levels. Your tax-deductible donation is crucial for prioritizing this important, scientifically-based work across the state of West Virginia and beyond.

**Remember, this work would not happen without your support!** Twenty years ago, I learned a little about the work of West Virginia Rivers. Now, I understand the awesome responsibility of what we do. I understand how much staff time it takes to study the science, how many people it takes to move the dial toward safer water and healthier streams. Every step forward is funded by you, by all of us, who believe in a better future for our state. Please do your part to help secure the future we all imagine.

With gratitude,



Chett Pritchett, Development Officer

*P.S. Please support our rivers, make a tax-deductible donation today. Donate online at [WVRivers.org](http://WVRivers.org) or return the enclosed envelope.*