





2023 PROGRAM SUMMARY

West Virginia Rivers Coalition is the statewide voice for the health of our rivers and streams, and for clean water for all.



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A note from Program Director, Autumn Crowe







Program Director, Autumn Crowe

At the core of our mission is a shared commitment to advocate for the health of our rivers and streams and ensuring clean water for all.

In 2023, we've made significant strides in water quality advocacy, public lands protection, citizen oversight, Ohio River Basin coalition building, and climate resilience.

In addition to our program work, our team has grown significantly. As such, we have prioritized organizational development and long-term planning to ensure that WV Rivers remains a steadfast and trusted leader in the environmental space in West Virginia and throughout the Appalachian Region.

I am thrilled to share our 2023 Program Summary with you, which covers the following areas:

Water Quality & Water Policy	Public Lands & Headwaters Protection	Citizen Oversight & Regulatory Enforcement	Ohio River Basin	Climate Change & Clean Energy Transition	Organizational Development
					

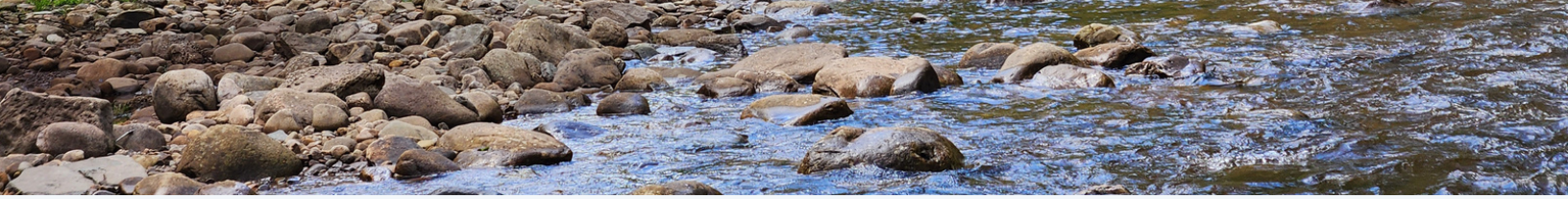
Our victories, fueled by your passion and dedication, echo far beyond legislative sessions and policy changes. They ripple through communities, leaving a lasting mark on the very fabric of our state.

Make no mistake: We couldn't do this work without you.

Thank you for being part of this coalition.

With determination,
Autumn Crowe





Angie Rosser
Executive Director



Autumn Crowe
Program Director

MEET OUR TEAM



Kate Leary
Operations Manager



Maggie Stange
Communications Manager



Crys Bauer
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Jenna Dodson
Staff Scientist



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Public Lands Campaign
Coordinator



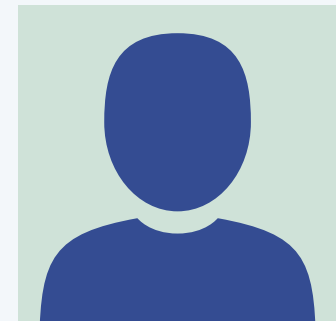
Heather Sprouse
Ohio River Coordinator



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Mariah Clay
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Organizer



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Water Quality & Water Policy

WV Rivers coordinates the WV Water Policy Workgroup, which comprises policy and water resource experts who provide analysis and recommendations for policy response during the legislative session and throughout the year.

PFAS Response. Following the release of a WV study finding that PFAS levels exceed current health advisories in the source water for 130 public water systems across the state, we published maps and fact sheets to help make the data accessible to the public. We conducted community forums, webinars, documentary screenings, and media outreach to build awareness of the health risks of PFAS exposure. That work directly led to the passage of the PFAS Protection Act in the 2023 legislative session – a big victory! Now, DEP is required to develop action plans for 130 communities to identify and reduce PFAS at the source, and industries are required to report and monitor the use of PFAS. The state must also propose a PFAS water quality standard immediately upon issuance of EPA's recommended criteria.

After the passage of the PFAS Protection Act, we shifted focus from filling informational gaps to planning for implementation. We submitted comments and spoke at an EPA public hearing on proposed PFAS national primary drinking water standards to support protective regulations and shared local experiences with contamination in the Eastern Panhandle and Ohio River Valley. When DEP released more information on public water systems exceeding PFAS health advisories, we analyzed the data and hosted a webinar to inform the public, with 75 attendees. We developed a document to serve as a blueprint for WV to reduce PFAS at its sources through the PFAS Protection Act and other policy mechanisms. Additionally, as state agencies do not currently test private wells for PFAS contamination, we awarded a mini-grant for a private well testing pilot project.

Water Quality & Water Policy (Cont.)

Holding Polluters Accountable. We submitted comments with three co-signing organizations urging DEP to deny a Chemours permit modification to discharge additional PFAS into the Ohio River at their Washington Works facility. An additional 349 individuals submitted comments through our action alert. Their permit modification was not approved – a success! We will be on the lookout for the re-issuance of their NPDES permit, where they will likely try again to increase PFAS discharges.

The DEP issued a consent order on APG Polytech LLC, which operates and maintains a treatment and disposal system for directly discharging treated industrial waste in Apple Grove, West Virginia. The APG facility discharges 1,4- dioxane (1, 4-D), a toxin that causes an increased risk of cancer from chronic exposures, into the Ohio River. We submitted comments with five sign-on organizations and published an action alert with an additional 319 individuals submitting comments. Unfortunately, DEP chose not to increase the \$30,000 fine.



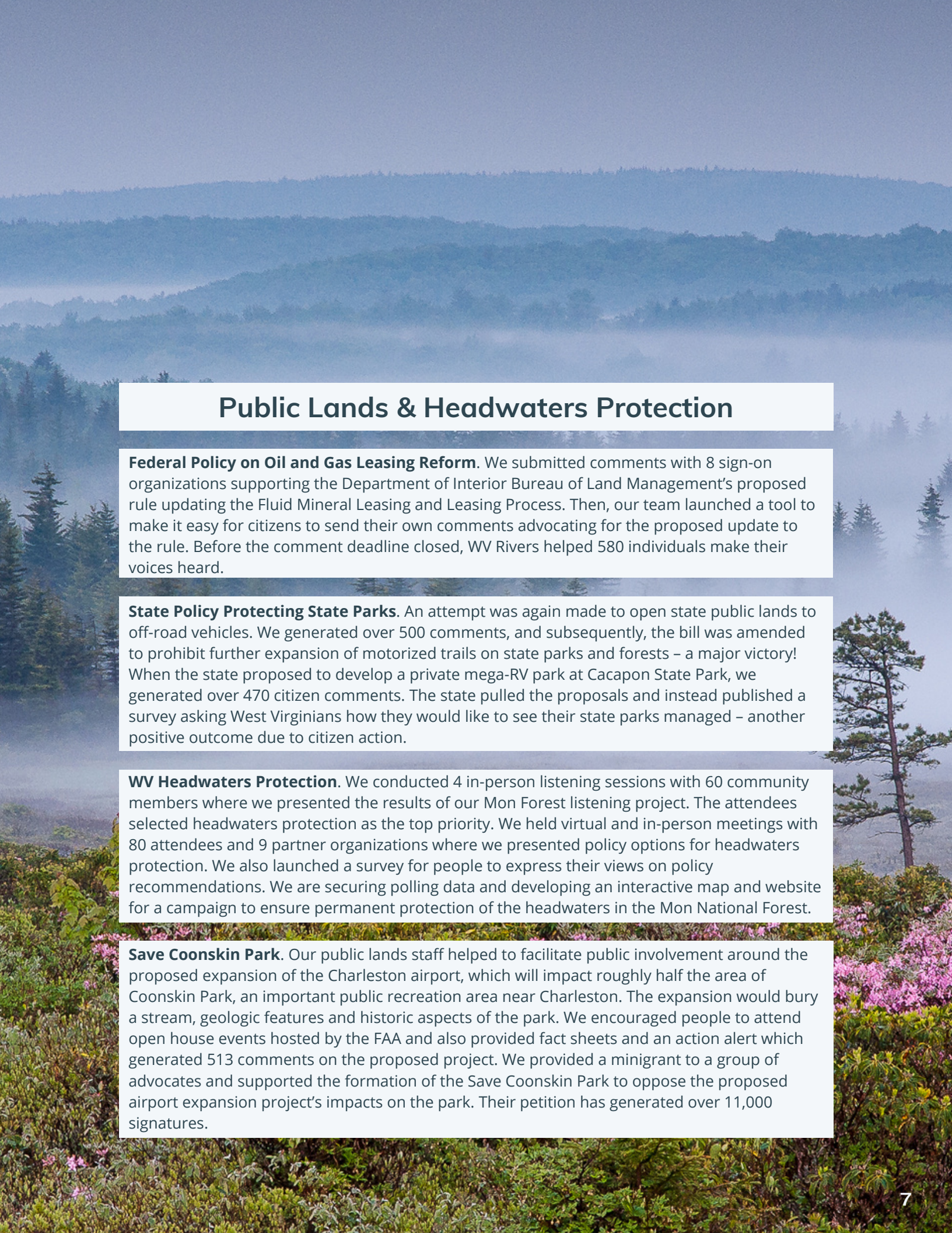


Water Quality & Water Policy (Cont.)

Funding for the Office of Oil and Gas. During this year's legislative session, there were no attempts to roll back oversight of oil and gas waste storage tanks. Instead, we advocated for increasing funding for the DEP Office of Oil and Gas. We successfully passed a bill to increase funding through industry fees and taxes to double the number of inspectors from 10 to 20 who oversee 75,000+ wells across the state.

WV Impaired Stream List. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed with our comments and found 346 stream segments, totaling over 1,600 stream miles, missing from WV's list of streams that fail to meet water quality standards. This is a major breakthrough for our long-time advocacy in getting WV to use scientifically justifiable assessment methodology to determine stream health (or impairment).

By only identifying aquatic insects at the family-level classification despite EPA's recommendations to use genus-level classifications, DEP has been long ignoring streams that are in need of restoration. We submitted technical comments with 12 co-signing organizations to the EPA with a decade of evidence showing that they made the right move, and 423 of our supporters also took action.



Public Lands & Headwaters Protection

Federal Policy on Oil and Gas Leasing Reform. We submitted comments with 8 sign-on organizations supporting the Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management's proposed rule updating the Fluid Mineral Leasing and Leasing Process. Then, our team launched a tool to make it easy for citizens to send their own comments advocating for the proposed update to the rule. Before the comment deadline closed, WV Rivers helped 580 individuals make their voices heard.

State Policy Protecting State Parks. An attempt was again made to open state public lands to off-road vehicles. We generated over 500 comments, and subsequently, the bill was amended to prohibit further expansion of motorized trails on state parks and forests – a major victory! When the state proposed to develop a private mega-RV park at Cacapon State Park, we generated over 470 citizen comments. The state pulled the proposals and instead published a survey asking West Virginians how they would like to see their state parks managed – another positive outcome due to citizen action.

WV Headwaters Protection. We conducted 4 in-person listening sessions with 60 community members where we presented the results of our Mon Forest listening project. The attendees selected headwaters protection as the top priority. We held virtual and in-person meetings with 80 attendees and 9 partner organizations where we presented policy options for headwaters protection. We also launched a survey for people to express their views on policy recommendations. We are securing polling data and developing an interactive map and website for a campaign to ensure permanent protection of the headwaters in the Mon National Forest.

Save Coonskin Park. Our public lands staff helped to facilitate public involvement around the proposed expansion of the Charleston airport, which will impact roughly half the area of Coonskin Park, an important public recreation area near Charleston. The expansion would bury a stream, geologic features and historic aspects of the park. We encouraged people to attend open house events hosted by the FAA and also provided fact sheets and an action alert which generated 513 comments on the proposed project. We provided a minigrant to a group of advocates and supported the formation of the Save Coonskin Park to oppose the proposed airport expansion project's impacts on the park. Their petition has generated over 11,000 signatures.



Citizen Oversight & Regulatory Advisory

Mountain Valley Pipeline. In early 2023, our efforts against the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) achieved several milestones. We submitted over 250 comments to the US Forest Service and 240 comments to the US Army Corps of Engineers regarding their environmental impact and mitigation framework. Successfully challenging WV's 401 water quality certification, we influenced the 4th Circuit Court's decision, citing MVP's history of violations.

Legal challenges against the US Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion showed promise, compelling MVP developers to seek congressional approval to complete the project. Despite our advocacy, Congress forced MVP's completion through a provision in the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) in May 2023, bypassing further legal challenges and public input.

Post-FRA, we funded volunteers to attend protests in Washington, DC, and challenged the FRA in the 4th Circuit Court, securing a temporary stay on construction. However, the Supreme Court lifted the stay, and the 4th Circuit dismissed our case, questioning the FRA's constitutionality. To address the environmental grief, we hosted virtual community care sessions and a Greenbrier River Celebration, fostering solidarity and resilience.

Engaging with senior DEP officials, we expressed concerns about DEP's ability to oversee 250 waterbody crossings in WV due to understaffing. To address this gap, we increased support for volunteer monitors, offering online and in-person training. In June, we conducted a virtual training on pipeline construction monitoring, followed by an August session on the Greenbrier River boring process and an October water quality monitoring training.

In September, we hired a full-time MVP Organizer to enhance outreach, education, support for impacted landowners, and pipeline monitoring. We participated in events like the We Are These Mountains gathering and the Climate March in New York City. Throughout construction, we assisted community members in holding MVP accountable by providing training and acting as a liaison with regulatory agencies.

Since construction resumed, we supported volunteers in monitoring and addressed six citizen complaints, leading to agency inspections and the addition of erosion control measures to protect water resources. Our vigilance and community engagement played a crucial role in preventing further deterioration in these identified problem areas.

Citizen Oversight & Regulatory Enforcement (Cont.)

Volunteer Stream Monitoring. In collaboration with Friends of the Cheat and Friends of Cacapon, our Volunteer Stream Monitoring program trained citizens in the Cheat and Cacapon Watershed for baseline data collection prior to proposed highway construction. Additional training sessions in Hurricane, Hillsboro, Morgantown, Wardensville, and Talcott engaged over 40 participants, empowering them to monitor non-point source pollution in their watersheds. Volunteers, now adept at identifying and reporting pollution, regularly input their data into our online portal, resulting in 1,411 water quality monitoring trips at 43 locations during the past year. Over the program's life, volunteers have completed 8,635 sampling trips at 624 sites. Ten citizen complaints in the past year led to two violations and enhanced oversight of water resources.

Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the program, we published a summary of decade-long findings. A water quality "Snapshot Day" in the Monongahela National Forest engaged volunteers in monitoring remote streams, and their efforts were recognized at an awards ceremony. Program successes were presented at the Mid-Atlantic Volunteer Monitoring conference and the National Water Quality Monitoring Conference.



Safe Water for West Virginia

Source Water Protection. We awarded Harpers Ferry and Marlinton the inaugural Source Water Community Awards for 2023. A water utility earns the designation as a Source Water Community if they have formed a partnership between their customers, community groups, and citizens that live within their source water protection area to take an active role in protecting the waters that serve as their drinking water source. These entities work together to provide community-based solutions to educate the community about the threats facing their drinking water supplies and collaboratively enact solutions to address those threats. The awards were presented to the Elks Run Watershed Group and the Greenbrier River Watershed Association at the 2023 Watershed Symposium.

Harpers Ferry. Projects that contributed towards the Source Water Community designation include:

- **Community Education.** Along with community partners, we hosted Earth Day WaterFaire at Sam Michaels Park with approximately 85 people in attendance. The event featured bird and nature walks, a rain barrel workshop, tree plantings, kids' activities, and educational activities for all ages.
- **Youth Education.** We supported Potomac Valley Audubon Society (PVAS) in developing a curriculum to teach students about the source of their drinking water. The program was showcased at 2 elementary schools reaching over 100 students this year. We also participated in PVAS's "Wild About Water" summer camp attended by 30 local youth. We led source water protection activities, including "The Incredible Journey" which focused on the water cycle and the Enviroscape, focusing on nonpoint source pollution.
- **Pollution Reduction.** We hosted a rain barrel workshop with community partners. 50 individuals attended, and we distributed 20 rain barrels to the community which will help to reduce stormwater pollution.



Marlinton. Projects that contributed towards the Source Water Community designation include:

- **Community Education.** We hosted an open house and kid's fishing derby at the water plant during Drinking Water Week reaching approximately 25 kids and their parents. Each child received a "Safe Drinking Water Starts with Me" tote bag full of kids' activities.
- **Youth Education.** We participated in a Water Day with Marlinton Middle School and introduced students to an Enviroscape to educate them about non-point source pollution and keeping our drinking water sources clean.
- **Community Project.** We developed a Wetland Walk, an educational park surrounding a wetland adjacent to the Greenbrier River Trail. The park features educational signage about the role wetlands play in improving drinking water sources.

Ohio River Basin

American Rivers named The Ohio River the second most endangered river in the country. We submitted the nomination and worked in coalition with partners on the public rollout of the announcement. The announcement was coupled with a call to action for Congress to allocate federal funding to support a restoration plan. The additional attention on the Ohio River will help catalyze a recovery plan.

We work regionally and locally in the Ohio River watershed to build support for a new vision for the region centered on sustainable community development and moving away from an economy based on industrial pollution.

Regional Coalitions. We continued participating in various coalitions and workgroups to stay connected to and support work across the region. We've served on the strategic planning committee for the multi-state Oil and Gas Waste Collaborative, the communications committee for the People Over Petro Coalition, the Knowledge for Informed Decisions, Toxics, Healthy Ecosystems, and Abundant Clean Water Workgroups of the Ohio River Basin Alliance. We supported the compiling of a report from frontline community listening sessions across all 14 Ohio River Basin states that are informing the federal Ohio River Restoration Plan.





Ohio River Basin (Cont.)

Community groups. Supporting local grassroots organizations is essential to building Ohio River Valley advocacy capacity. We provide staff support with building the capacity of the following community groups: Mid-Ohio Valley Climate Action, Wheeling Creek Watershed Group, Friends of Fourpole Creek, and Parkersburg District 4. Additionally, we've provided funds to support grassroots organizations. Minigrantees included Friends of the Tug Fork, Friends for Environmental Justice, Our Future West Virginia, District 4 Community Action, For West Virginia's Future, Paint Creek Watershed Association, Walhonde Adventures, and WV Women Environmental Advocates.

We participated in several community events in Parkersburg to help build relationships in that community. Parkersburg has been a focus area because of its strategic location in the mid-Ohio River Valley and because it represents the challenges that so many Ohio River communities face. We attended the Parkersburg Earth Day event with 50 other attendees. We tabled at the Parkersburg Multi-Culture Fest and gained 90 new supporters. We co-hosted the Harvest the Vision event, reaching 100 community members. We hosted a women's advocate luncheon to build stronger relationships with the women leading the environmental movement in the Ohio River Valley, with 12 leaders attending. All the women expressed interest in continuing the women's environmental advocate network.

A notable accomplishment in the Ohio River Valley this year is the response to a proposed medical waste incinerator in Ravenswood. We educated the community about this facility, attended community meetings, and supported local community organizers. We participated in the public hearing for the air quality permit, hosted an action alert to make it easy for community members to submit comments, generating 339 actions, expressed our concerns through written and oral comments, and followed up with agency personnel. The air quality permit was granted; however, the Department of Health and Human Resources denied its approval because the medical waste incineration facility is prohibited by current state regulations.



Climate Change & Clean Energy Transition

WV Climate Alliance. We coordinate the WV Climate Alliance, a statewide coalition whose members work together to provide science-based education and advocacy on climate solutions to West Virginia communities and policymakers. This year, we successfully provided a more formal structure for the climate alliance with a mission statement, a leadership structure, a list of priorities, and a decision-making process.

Inflation Reduction Act Implementation. We coordinated and spoke at a series of community meetings focused on climate provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). We provided information to help individuals, local governments, businesses, and nonprofits improve energy efficiency and invest in clean power.

We presented in Montgomery, Charleston, Wheeling, Morgantown, Fayetteville, and Gauley Bridge. We spoke about IRA and IIJA implementation at Climate Alliance events, such as the Council of Churches event on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. We convened a workgroup and met with state agency staff about implementing state programs under the BIL and IRA. We are supporting IRA implementation strategies for a community group in West Charleston. We also got all major WV municipalities signed on for the Solar for All grant application.

Just Transition. As we work to address climate change, we must also ensure that the legacy of coal pollution is addressed. WV Rivers facilitates the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Workgroup, a subcommittee of the Water Policy Workgroup that meets bi-weekly. An in-person meeting was held in August to strategize the workgroup's goals. WV Rivers and four sign-on organizations sent a letter to Senator Manchin's staff requesting support for a government accountability office investigation of modern-era idle and un-reclaimed mine lands.

In partnership with State University of New York and Northeastern University, we are researching the impacts of the just transition on impacted communities. In Montgomery and Talcott, we have initiated a photo voice project where residents can document how the transition plays out in their communities.

Climate Change & Clean Energy Transition (Cont.)

Hydrogen. As our region is targeted for a Hydrogen Hub, we educated our members about the impacts of blue hydrogen. We hosted a 'lunch and learn' webinar on the climate, water, health, and environmental justice impacts of hydrogen with 66 registrants. We published a blue hydrogen fact sheet, printed and on our website.

We participated as a panelist for "Hydrogen Hubs, Explained" and spoke on the health and environmental justice issues with blue hydrogen. The regional blue hydrogen hub project, ARCH2, is to receive up to \$925 million in granted funds from the US Department of Energy. In partnership with Ohio River Valley Institute, we have identified economic, environmental, and public health concerns with these projects, both of which would deploy an interstate network of carbon capture and storage infrastructure to support various blue hydrogen production facilities across the region.

We attended the WV Economic Development Authority meeting to raise concerns about a \$62.5M forgivable loan to Fidelis for a blue hydrogen facility, echoing climate, health, and environmental justice issues raised in an accompanying written comment letter.

As the Department of Energy just released its plans to fund the ARCH2 Hydrogen Hub, we have been attending the listening session to understand what this means for the impacted community. This will be intense work in the months and years ahead.





Climate Change & Clean Energy Transition (Cont.)

Methane. Because methane has a more potent greenhouse effect than carbon, it is essential that we reduce emissions both from existing oil and gas infrastructure and legacy emissions from orphaned and abandoned wells. We supported EPA's move to regulate methane by speaking at their public hearing and submitting written comments with 19 organizations signing on. We also assisted in placing 2 letters to the editor supporting the methane regulations. Our action alert generated 44 comments.

We continued to educate and support communities impacted by leaking oil and gas wells. We co-hosted a community meeting on Crouch Hollow Mountain in the Rutledge Area of Charleston with the EPA Director of the Office of Communities, Tribes, and Environmental Assessment. Three media outlets attended - WCHS, Gazette-Mail, and an independent media creator. We deployed a methane monitor on the tour and reported the findings to DEP. We also provided a mini-grant to Friends for Environmental Justice to continue the work in engaging communities and advocating for the plugging of abandoned wells.

As we educated more residents about the dangers of methane, we started receiving more complaints about air pollution and abandoned and orphaned wells. We followed up on these complaints and deployed methane detectors, an inexpensive handheld meter that detects combustible levels of methane in the atmosphere. We set up an online reporting form for residents in possession of the "sniffers" to report when they get hits.

In coordination with partners, we participated in an abandoned well tour in Kanawha State Forest. We used the methane sniffer on the tour and received several hits on it around abandoned wells. As EPA finalizes its methane rule, we will continue to educate about the dangers of methane and encourage decision-makers to support the rule.

Organizational Development

WV Rivers is heavily invested this year in thoughtfully managing our growth in a way that sustains the organization and supports the larger environmental movement.

Strategic Planning. We hired a consultant to work with the board and staff on developing a new Strategic Framework, which is set to be adopted by the board before the end of the year. The Strategic Framework lays out a new Purpose Statement, Values, and Long-Term Directional Goals to guide the organization in its programming and operations over the next ten years.

Compensation Project. We worked with an HR consultant to do a full review of staff positions, salary bands, and benefits with the aim of attracting and retaining talented staff. This work will lead to an organizational compensation philosophy and a 5-year compensation plan.

Development Plan. We developed a 3-year plan and budget for internal organizational development work to support our Strategic Framework implementation. Areas of work include annual planning, organizational culture building, personnel and compensation policies, hiring and staff structure, diversity equity and inclusion, systems upgrades, and board development.



**Want to learn more about our efforts?
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Photo Acknowledgements

Page 1 - New River at Thurmond, NRG courtesy of Chad Cordell

Page 5 - Sediment Plume courtesy of Maury Johnson

Page 7 - WV Wilderness courtesy of Kent Mason

Page 8 - MVP pipe in a field, exposed to elements courtesy of Maury Johnson

Page 10 - Water Plant Tour courtesy of Marlyn Photography

Page 11 - Barge on a misty Ohio River courtesy of Kent Mason

Page 16 - The WV Rivers Team at Blackwater Falls State Park courtesy of Mark Moody

Page 17 - WV Wilderness courtesy of Kent Mason