




# 2024 PROGRAM SUMMARY

*West Virginia Rivers Coalition Inc. (WV Rivers) is the statewide voice for protecting the health of our waterways and ensuring clean water for all.*



 304-637-7201

 [wvrivers@wvrivers.org](mailto:wvrivers@wvrivers.org)

 [wvrivers.org](http://wvrivers.org)

 3501 MacCorkle Ave SE #129 Charleston, WV

# 2024: A Year of Growth and Change

Aldo Leopold once said, “There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot.” This year we continued our efforts to protect our waters and wild and wonderful places. And, as we look back on this year, we are proud of many accomplishments. These wouldn’t have been possible without you.

This past year has been one of reflection and growth. We initiated a new strategic plan that charts a path forward to promote clean and healthy waters for all West Virginians. In addition to supporting the growth and development of the organization, we are focusing our efforts in four strategic directions:

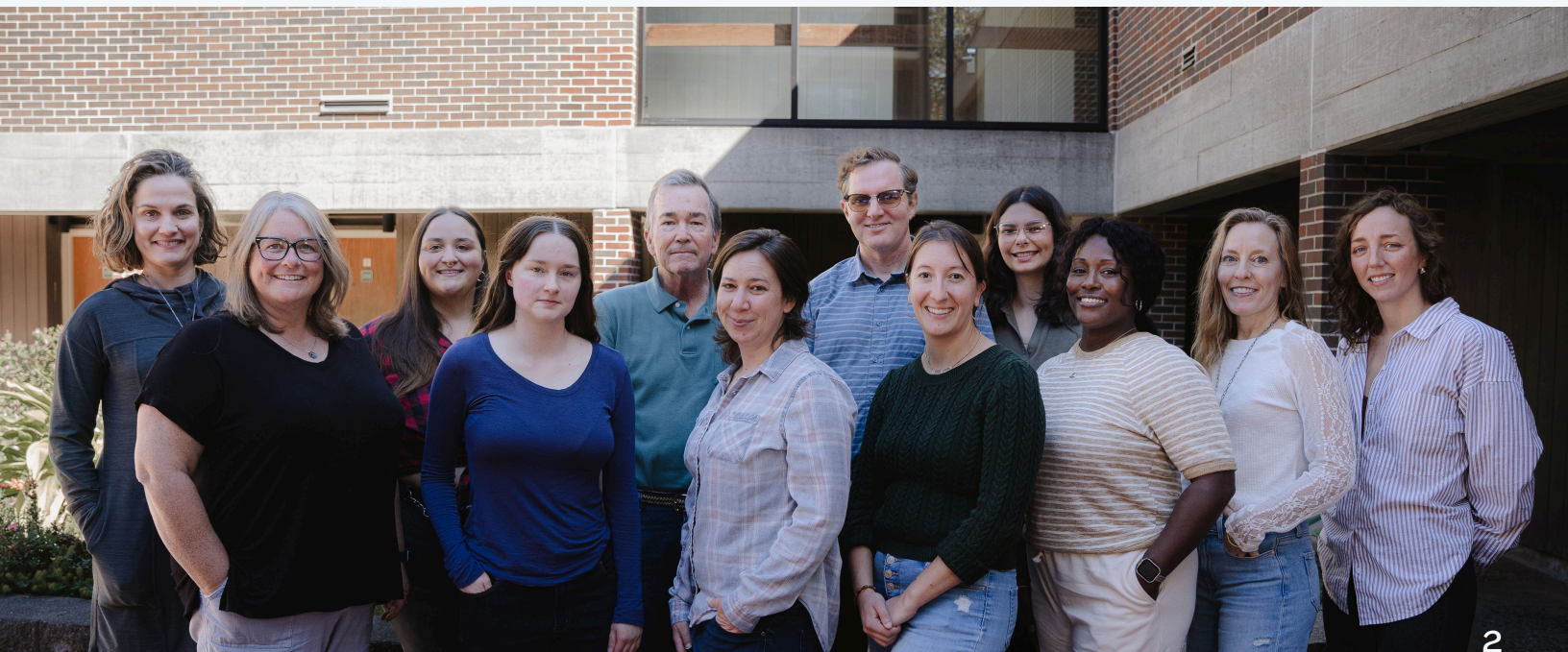
Improving Water Policy	Public Lands & Headwaters Protection	Climate & Energy Justice	Empowering Communities & Grassroots Organizations
			

Together, we committed to fostering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) as core principles in our work. We brought on a consultant to guide staff and board training, helping us create a stronger sense of belonging in our workplace and community. We also developed 10 values to anchor our efforts—values rooted in inclusivity, fairness, and centering the voices of disadvantaged communities.

2024 marks a big milestone for WV Rivers as we bid farewell to Angie Rosser, our Executive Director of 12 years, and warmly welcomed Jennie Smith as our new leader. Thanks to your support, we’ve navigated this transition thoughtfully, preparing WV Rivers for sustainable growth. We reorganized to better serve our mission, promoting staff into specialized roles and adding regional coordinators to reach underserved areas.

With a growing team of 12, we’re excited to continue strengthening our internal systems to ensure WV Rivers is poised for even greater impact in 2025 and beyond.

Your generosity makes all of this possible—thank you for standing with us to protect West Virginia’s rivers and ensure clean, healthy waters for future generations!



## Meet the Team



**Jennie Smith**  
Executive Director



**Autumn Crowe**  
Deputy Director



**Shannon Cunningham-Snead**  
Director of Finance &  
Operations



**Than Hitt**  
Senior Scientist



**Maria Russo**  
Policy Specialist



**Mike Jones**  
Conservation Manager



**Kate Leary**  
Operations Manager



**Maggie Stange**  
Communications Manager



**Heather Sprouse**  
Community Engagement  
Manager



**Charlise Robinson**  
Ohio River Coordinator



**Mariah Clay**  
Southern WV Coordinator



**Crys Bauer**  
Membership Coordinator

**We're Hiring!** Our team is growing in 2025. Visit [wvivers.org](http://wvivers.org) to see our latest job postings, or sign up for our email newsletter to be alerted about openings.





## Improving Water Policy: Grassroots Action at the Legislature

WV Rivers coordinates the WV Water Policy Workgroup, comprised of policy and water resource experts who provide policy recommendations during the legislative session and throughout the year.

**Clean Water for All Event:** On January 9, 2024, we brought more than 300 people together to mark 10 years since a chemical used to clean coal leaked from an above-ground storage tank directly into the Elk River, contaminating the water supply for people across nine counties. This free "sold-out" event featured partners tabling and promoting their efforts, food and drink, storytelling from community members and short films documenting the 2014 water crisis, a community art project, and live music from Sierra Ferrell, The Local Honeyes, The Mill Creek Cronies, Mike Pushkin, Lucia Valentine, and Jade Tremba. It was hosted the evening before the start of the 2024 WV Legislative Session.

**2024 Legislative Session:** During the 2024 legislative session, our supporters sent over 35,000 messages to lawmakers! We defeated several bad bills, one that could have opened our public lands to widespread timbering and undefined "economic development" and another that would have limited the ability of communities to utilize air monitoring data to protect the health and well-being of our residents.

**2024 Special Session:** A bill authorizing state regulation of low-level radioactive materials was placed on the agenda of the special session with little public notice. More than 825 of our members and supporters took action asking legislators to take their time to more carefully consider this serious issue during the 2025 regular session. Despite the public's request, the bill was passed during the special session.





## Improving Water Policy: Addressing Toxic Pollution

**Implementing the PFAS Protection Act.** Following the historic passage of the PFAS Protection Act in 2023, we published a report, "[Addressing Forever Chemicals in WV](#)," to serve as a blueprint to implement the PFAS Protection Act and provide recommendations to the WV Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) to address PFAS contamination. The recommendations include tracking PFAS sources, improving PFAS policies, and guidance around equitable community engagement.

**EPA Environmental Justice Grant Partnership.** WVDEP, in partnership with WV Rivers as the lead community-based organization, was awarded a 3-year grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Environmental Justice Government to Government program. The grant funds the development of effective and equitable action plans to address PFAS pollution in drinking water sources, with the input of impacted communities. Our role is to facilitate community engagement in public meetings, support community ambassadors, and ensure the community's knowledge is incorporated into PFAS Action Plans. The action plans drafted through this process in the Northern and Eastern Panhandles will help set the model for the rest of the state.

**Raising Awareness.** We co-hosted a press conference and informational webinar with Physicians for Social Responsibility to publicize their report identifying the use of PFAS in oil and gas operations or "[Fracking with Forever Chemicals in WV](#)."

**Advocating for Stronger Protections.** Additionally, we submitted comments to EPA, along with 700 of our members and supporters, on proposed designations under the Toxic Substances Control Act for 5 carcinogenic chemicals (acetaldehyde, acrylonitrile, benzenamine, vinyl chloride, and 4,4'-methylenebis), urging EPA to designate them as high priority. Several of these chemicals are used by industry and discharged into our waters.

# Improving Water Policy: Holding Polluters Accountable

**The Problem with Petrochemicals:** West Virginia faces a growing threat from petrochemical facilities that pollute our land, air, and water. From discharging harmful chemicals like PFAS and ethylbenzene into major waterways to proposing new projects that would turn oil and gas into toxic materials, these industries put our communities and environment at risk. Facilities along the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers have been at the center of pollution concerns, threatening the health of West Virginians and the ecosystems we rely on. Here's what actions we've taken:

- 1. Preventing Violations of Human Health Criteria.** This Spring, WVDEP issued a consent order that would have allowed The Chemours Company, LLC's Optima Belle facility to discharge ethylbenzene into the Kanawha River at levels six times higher than the EPA's human health criteria. We submitted comments opposing this action with an additional 472 comments from our members and supporters. As a result, WVDEP withdrew the consent order.
- 2. Reducing Discharges into the Ohio River.** At their Washington Works facility near Parkersburg, Chemours requested a new and separate discharge permit from WVDEP to construct a new finishing line, allowing additional PFAS discharges into the Ohio River. We assisted community members in Parkersburg in requesting a public hearing and preparing comments. Our action alert led to an additional 746 comments. We submitted technical comments with 10 organizational sign-ons and were represented by Earth Justice and Appalachian Mountain Advocates with further technical comments. WVDEP granted the permit but required Chemours to reduce discharge limits for PFAS by ~90%.
- 3. Taking Chemours to Court.** In November, after over a year of inaction from the EPA, we filed a lawsuit against The Chemours Company FC, LLC ("Chemours") for ongoing Clean Water Act violations at their Washington Works facility for allowing excessive PFAS pollution into the Ohio River. Despite a Compliance Order issued by the EPA in 2023, these violations have continued unabated. This lawsuit seeks civil penalties to ensure compliance and prevent further PFAS contamination in our waters.
- 4. Mobilizing Voices for Our Future.** In collaboration with Only One, we launched an online petition urging the Governor to safeguard West Virginia's lands, waters, and cultural heritage by halting the use of taxpayer funds to subsidize corporate polluters. With nearly 4,000 signatures gathered, we delivered the petition to the Governor's office, urging him to stand up for West Virginians and stop giving tax dollars to five projects proposed by out-of-state corporations. These facilities would transform oil and gas into chemicals and plastics or burn toxic materials to produce fuel—all in our backyards. The proposed projects include: Clean-Seas Chemical Recycling Facility (Kanawha County), US Methanol Liberty Two (Kanawha County), Pleasants County Methanol Plant (Waverly County), Empire Green Generation (Brooke County), Adams Fork Energy (Mingo County).



# Improving Water Policy: Holding Polluters Accountable

**Coal Mining Pollution.** Represented by Appalachian Mountain Advocates, WV Rivers, Sierra Club, and WV Highlands Conservancy sued the EPA for failure to enforce the Clean Water Act. EPA approved the WVDEP's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), or pollution budget, for the Guyandotte River, but the TMDL did not address the main impairment of the watershed, the ionic toxicity due to mining activities. A settlement agreement was reached that requires WVDEP to develop the state's first pollution budget to address ionic pollution in the Guyandotte Watershed. This action sets a precedent to address mining pollution in other impaired watersheds.

**Oil and Gas Pollution.** We commented to the EPA in support of the Methane Emissions Reduction Program rules, which would charge a fee to help reduce wasteful methane emissions. Our advocacy around reducing methane emissions earned us a seat on the Community Benefits Committee for the DEP's Office of Oil and Gas to provide input on what factors should be used to create a ranking system for selecting Marginal Conventional Wells to be plugged. We attended public meetings and made recommendations to WVDEP on how to prioritize marginal well-plugging in the state.



# Improving Water Policy: Holding Polluters Accountable

**Mountain Valley Pipeline:** To shed light on the injustices surrounding the approval of the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) and its impact on landowners, we took several actions:

- 1. Video Series on MVP Injustices:** We created a [video series](#) to amplify the voices of impacted landowners and raise awareness of the pipeline's harmful effects. The series includes three short videos published on our YouTube channel and social media platforms.
- 2. Supporting Landowners with Flooding and Water Contamination Issues:** We worked closely with affected landowners to document flooding and well water contamination caused by MVP construction. These issues were reported to the WVDEP to hold MVP accountable.
- 3. Commissioning Environmental Analysis:** To better understand the environmental impact of MVP, we commissioned Downstream Strategies to analyze audits of stream crossings conducted before and after pipeline construction. A report, [MVP Stream and Wetland Audit](#), was released in late 2024. The data revealed that despite implementing best management practices, 96% of streams crossed by MVP showed negative impacts on biological conditions and aquatic communities.





# Improving Water Policy: Holding Polluters Accountable

**Volunteer Stream Monitoring:** In 2024, volunteer water quality monitors conducted 607 monitoring trips at 59 locations. In partnership with Friends of the Cheat, we provided a visual assessment training to monitor potential impacts for the construction of Corridor H for the Parsons-Davis segment. A photo monitoring point was established at the Holly Meadows bridge. We updated the WV Stream Watch App to version 2.0, which is the platform citizens use to report pollution issues. As a result of citizen watchdogging, we facilitated the submission of 17 citizen complaints to the WVDEP. Most of the complaints reported erosion control failures on the MVP. One complaint documented sewage discharge into a tributary of the Kanawha River. Another complaint detailed water quality violations in [Indian Creek](#).



Scan to Download the  
WV Stream Watch App





## Public Lands & Headwaters Protection

**Federal Policy on Oil and Gas Leasing Reform.** The Department of Interior (DOI) finalized a rule to modernize oil and gas leasing on federal lands. The new rule increases bonding requirements, adjusts reclamation costs for inflation, and ends costly non-competitive leasing. Now, fees paid by applicants will reflect actual costs. Over 580 of our members and supporters sent comments in support of the DOI rules for oil and gas leasing on federal lands.

**Permanent Safeguards for Waterways within the Monongahela National Forest.** We've made significant progress in our campaign to secure permanent protections for headwater streams on public lands. As part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition's "Hill Week" in Washington, DC, we met with staff from all four of West Virginia's Congressional Representatives to advocate for safeguarding Mon Forest headwaters. To better understand public attitudes, we conducted a statewide scientific poll of West Virginia voters, which revealed strong support: 85% favor permanent protections for Mon Forest headwaters, 81% believe we can protect water and land while maintaining a strong economy, and 86% supported additional waterway protections after learning more about the issue. In addition to building grassroots support by partnering with allies and providing educational materials at festivals and events, we hosted a five-week art exhibit, "Create the Mon." This exhibit featured the work of 20 artists who beautifully showcased the importance of protecting Mon Forest's pristine headwaters.

**Forest Service Comments.** We prepared comments regarding the Forest Red Spruce Restoration proposal and the national Old Growth management plan impacting four forests in our region. The Forest Service agreed with our comment regarding the importance of not having a single definition for old-growth forests. Twelve other groups signed on to support our red spruce restoration comments, with over 700 of our members and supporters and over 900 supporting our old-growth forest management comments.

**Coonskin Park.** Coonskin Park in Kanawha County was under threat from plans to expand Charleston's airport. The proposal would have covered the forested areas and hiking trails in the park for runaway expansion. Over 11,000 signed the petition opposing the plan. The Airport Authority has now canceled the proposed runway extension.

# Climate and Energy Justice

**Energy Transition.** We supported Conservation WV in learning about West Virginian's views on climate change and a just transition. 82% of those polled agreed that climate change is occurring and is mostly caused by human activities. However, addressing climate change is not a top priority in voting decisions, falling behind issues like healthcare, education, job creation, and addressing the opioid crisis. We also learned that West Virginians feel largely positive about solar and wind energy across the political spectrum, showing unity around renewable energy development. Additionally, messaging around job creation and creating a state that young people will want to stay in resonated across the political spectrum.

**WV Climate Alliance.** In 2024, we transferred the facilitation of the WV Climate Alliance to the WV Citizen Action Group. WV Rivers still serves on the coordinating committee and continues to engage where climate intersects with clean water to promote climate mitigation that protects communities from droughts and flooding.



# Climate and Energy Justice

**Fracking Waste.** The EPA and WVDEP hosted a public meeting to detail their efforts to address radioactive fracking waste left behind at the abandoned Fairmont Brine processing facility. We partnered with Downstream Strategies to create a [fact sheet](#) to inform community members about the issue. Despite the agency updates, residents continued to express concerns about exposure risks and the long-term impacts on their community.

**Blue Hydrogen.** Much is unknown about the location and facilities included in the Appalachian Regional “Clean” Hydrogen Hub (ARCH2). However, we know the hub will create [blue hydrogen](#) using methane gas as the feedstock which will perpetuate the harms caused by fracking. We attended listening sessions, conducted outreach to agencies, and organized in the impacted communities. We met with ARCH2 community benefits managers and submitted letters highlighting our environmental justice concerns, raising those concerns at public hearings. ARCH2 hosted an open house in November where we participated both in the open house and a press conference outside the event, which received [media coverage](#).

**Blue Ammonia.** A blue ammonia facility is proposed by TransGas in Adams Fork of Mingo County. The facility would be constructed on a reclaimed strip mine but would use methane as its feedstock exacerbating air quality concerns. We helped the impacted community request a public hearing on the WVDEP’s draft air permit. We hosted a public meeting where we presented information about the potential health impacts and connected residents with technical and legal expertise. We submitted comments urging greater community protection from nitrogen oxide (NOx). Despite the community’s concerns, WVDEP granted the permit. However, we were successful in getting the harmful air emissions reduced.

**Class VI Carbon Injection Wells.** In November, we learned about the EPA’s proposal to give the WVDEP oversight of the Class VI Underground Injection Well program, which would permit the injection of carbon dioxide underground. The public hearing was scheduled for December 30. We immediately put together an action alert asking West Virginians to request additional public hearings and an extension to the comment period since it fell during the busy holiday season. Despite 167 of our members and supporters submitting the request, EPA did not grant an extension. Represented by Appalachian Mountain Advocates, we submitted comments to EPA expressing our concerns about carbon injection impacts on our air, water, public health, and property rights.

# Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**Building Coalitions for Watershed Restoration.** We work both regionally and locally in the Ohio River and Chesapeake Bay watersheds. In the Chesapeake Bay, we serve as the state lead for the Choose Clean Water Coalition, which advocates for the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. As state lead, we coordinate with partners to implement the Watershed Improvement Plan for the headwaters of the Potomac. The Chesapeake Bay agreement expires in 2025, and we are working to ensure that WV re-commits to the goals of the agreement beyond 2025.

In the Ohio River region, we are creating a new vision that is centered on sustainable community development instead of an economy based on industrial pollution. As part of the multi-state effort, we are leading efforts in WV to secure federal funding for the restoration of the Ohio River, similar to the Bay program. We helped to develop and disseminate the findings of a report, [Community Priorities for Ohio River Basin Restoration and Protection](#). We are thrilled to announce that federal legislation for the Ohio River was introduced at the end of 2024.

In preparation for a watershed-scale Ohio River Restoration program, we brought together lawmakers from the Monongahela River Watershed from PA, MD, and WV to discuss challenges such as flooding and opportunities to improve recreational access and economic development.

**Building Capacity in Grassroots Organizations.** We continue to build capacity within grassroots organizations through our community action mini-grant program to increase advocacy efforts at the local, state, and federal levels for clean water and public health protections. In 2024, we awarded nearly \$30,000 to 12 grassroots organizations and watershed groups to support their efforts in educating their communities, advocating for access to clean water, testing their water for contaminants, resisting additional fossil fuel buildout, and protecting their communities from additional harm.



# Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**Safe Water for West Virginia.** This program assists water utilities in implementing the management strategies identified in their source water protection plans to protect drinking water sources. We partnered with watershed groups and assisted with implementing projects in the following locations:

**Harpers Ferry:** We hosted a Watershed Walk along Elks Run to assess the availability and quality of Harpers Ferry's drinking water source. We attended the Harpers Ferry Water Commission public meeting to hear the status of the Source Water Protection Plan.



**Marlinton:** We developed an agreement with the Greenbrier River Watershed Association to partner on projects that educate the community and promote the protection of Marlinton's drinking water source. In August, we attended First Friday at Discovery Junction where we educated youth about nonpoint source pollution with the Enviroscope.

**Buckhannon:** In partnership with the Buckhannon River Watershed Association, we hosted the 8th annual Buckhannon River Fest, which included a flatwater paddle and hands-on water educational activities to learn about protecting their drinking water. Over 150 people enjoyed the festival.



**Fayetteville:** In partnership with Plateau Action Network (PAN) and other local organizations, we co-sponsored Artists of the New Festival, which features artists living along the New River whose work is often inspired by their natural environment. We hosted an activity where participants made lino prints that featured a fish and the words "River Protection Starts with Me." Approximately 400 people attended the event.

## Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**Ripple Effects Film Series:** We hosted two Ripple Effects film screenings. In Martinsburg, we showed *Fern Gully: The Last Rainforest* at Yankauer Nature Preserve in partnership with the Potomac Valley Audubon Society and the American Conservation Film Festival. In Harpers Ferry, we screened *The Cost of Forever* and *Keepers of the Land*. Before the films, we spoke about PFAS contamination in our waters. Participants made a “We Say No to PFAS” print on reusable bags and could opt into our [PFAS Free Pledge](#).

**Clean Water for All Mural:** At Clean Water for All, more than 100 community members helped to paint a mural, led by 2024 WV Artist of the Year, Nichole Westfall. The mural depicts West Virginia’s vibrant and diverse streams of life, with Great Blue Heron, Red Spotted Newt, Native Brook Trout, and other wildlife alongside children splashing in the creek, catching crawdads. At its center, the phrase “In each drop a dream: All our mountain streams run clean” reflects a shared hope for the future. The mural has since traveled to 12 communities across the state, sparking conversations about local water challenges and inspiring people to think about their role in ensuring clean water for all.





## Acknowledgements

As we reflect on 2024, we are deeply grateful for our donors, supporters, and volunteers. Your contributions — whether through funding, time, or advocacy — have driven our work to protect West Virginia’s rivers and ensure clean water for all. Your commitment has enabled us to achieve meaningful progress, from tackling pressing environmental challenges like PFAS contamination to amplifying the voices of communities advocating for healthy watersheds and resilient ecosystems. Together, we’ve hosted events that inspire, educated future stewards of the land, and forged partnerships that will sustain this important work for years to come. Thank you for standing with us for clean water, public lands, and healthy communities.