



# 2025 IMPACT REPORT

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



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## 2025 Recap: Message from the Executive Director

For West Virginians, protecting clean water has always been a shared effort — neighbors looking out for one another, communities coming together, and local leaders stepping up for the places they love. In 2025, we leaned into that energy and made it a core driver of our strategy to ensure a future with clean water for all in the Mountain State.

West Virginia Rivers Coalition reached more communities than ever before, showing up in more places, supporting more local leaders, and helping West Virginians take action to protect their water, lands, and health. Across the state, we continued to see the same truth: people power works and when communities have access to information, tools, and support, they lead.

This year, WV Rivers strengthened our ability to meet communities where they are. We expanded our community engagement work, held more PFAS-focused meetings, and supported residents navigating contamination, cleanup challenges, and difficult questions about long-term health and water safety. We also lifted up the work of our mini-grantees, who are driving local solutions in their own watersheds and towns — often with limited resources. What they do have, however, is a deep knowledge, determination, and commitment to their neighbors and family.

We continued investing in statewide collaboration and shared learning through the West Virginia Watershed Network. Watershed groups across West Virginia are doing essential work: monitoring streams, restoring habitat, educating their communities, and advocating for stronger protections for our water and land. WV Rivers is proud to support this network by connecting groups, sharing resources, and strengthening technical and science capacity across the state.

A key part of that support is our expanding work in community water monitoring. In 2025, we trained new volunteers, increased participation in monitoring efforts, and supported communities collecting baseline data in places facing both long-standing pollution and new industrial threats. We also continued to strengthen pathways for residents to report concerns through tools like the WV Stream Watch App, helping ensure community observations can translate into agency attention and enforcement.

Water monitoring is a way for communities to document what they know, build credible evidence, and action. When we share that data, we get a more complete picture of the state of our rivers and streams so we can build the strategy to improve upon them with the care they deserve.

This impact report highlights the breadth of WV Rivers' work this year. From statewide policy and technical advocacy to community-led campaigns and science, thank you for standing with us. Your support helps ensure West Virginians have the resources and backing they need to protect the waters and lands that sustain us all.

With gratitude,  
Jennie Smith  
Executive Director, West Virginia Rivers Coalition



# Meet the Team



**Jennie Smith**  
Executive Director



**Autumn Crowe**  
Deputy Director



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



**Scott Mandirola**  
Technical Advisor on Water Policy & Regulations



**Than Hitt**  
Senior Scientist



**Maria Russo**  
Policy Specialist



**Maggie Stange**  
Communications Manager



**Kate Leary**  
Operations Manager



**Mike Jones**  
Conservation Manager



**Carrie Decker**  
Community Engagement Manager



**Charlise Robinson**  
Ohio River Coordinator



**Blake Flessas**  
Northern WV Coordinator



**Mariah Clay**  
Southern WV Coordinator

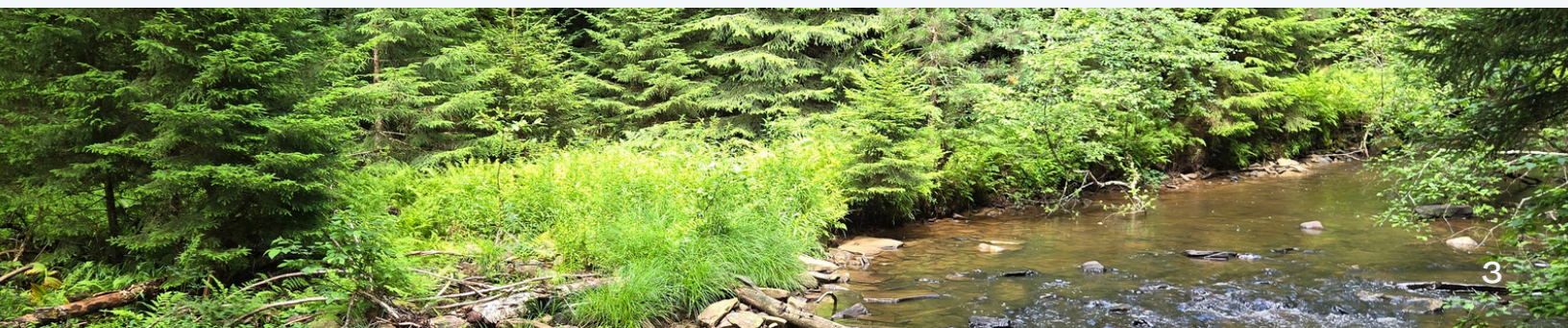


**Crys Bauer**  
Development Manager

Our work is possible because of the dedication, expertise, and care of our staff and board of directors. In 2025, we welcomed Carrie, Blake, and Scott to the team and said goodbye to Crys and Mariah.

The WV Rivers' 2025 Board of Directors included: Mac Thornton (Chair), Shawn Romano (Vice-Chair), Stephen Estrada (Treasurer), Ed Gertler (Secretary), Paul Breuer, Ben Hawkins, Jennifer Sass, Margot Stiles, Betsy Pyle, Dave Bassage, Dr. Danny Twilley, and Ryan C. Gaujot, P.H.

Looking ahead, our team is growing. We are hiring in 2026! Visit [wvrivers.org](http://wvrivers.org) to check for job postings and [sign up](#) for our email newsletter to be the first to hear about new opportunities.







*A headwater Stream in the Monongahela National Forest.*

## Improving Water Policy: 2025 Legislative Session

The public's voice is critical to help preserve public lands and improve water quality. Last Legislative session, we enabled 10,000 people to send 100,000 emails to our lawmakers!

Because of your advocacy, the following bills failed:

1. Rollbacks to the Above Ground Storage Tank Act,
2. Restricting the use of community air monitoring data,
3. Allowing motorized vehicles on public lands, and
4. The "anti-science" bill which would have banned the use of scientific journals in regulation.

One bill was improved: a bill allowing carbon injection in pore space under state parks passed, but thanks to advocacy efforts, it was amended to prohibit road building, truck traffic and pipeline construction within state park boundaries.

Despite over 1,000 comments from constituents, water quality standards were modified to allow industry to downgrade a waterbody's use from drinking water to recreation, clearing the way to weaken water quality standards in certain streams. This change will require public notice and a comment opportunity, so we'll need your help to oppose any weakening of designated uses during DEP's public process.

At the end of the session, a bill was pushed through that paved the way for data centers to be constructed in WV. It took away local control and tax benefits from local communities. We'll support opportunities to restore local control and increase public transparency during the 2026 Legislative Session.



*People gathering at the WV State Capitol for Environmental Day at the Legislature.*





*State Leads for the Choose Clean Water Coalition gather in Harpers Ferry, WV.*

## Improving Water Policy: Protecting Water from Standards to Source

**Water Quality Standards.** Over the summer, we submitted comments opposing the DEP's proposal to weaken the water quality standard for selenium during the 2026 Legislative Session. The change would allow more selenium to be discharged in surface water impacted by coal mining by removing a sensitive species of fish called the sturgeon from the fish tissue sampling requirement in certain waterways. The EPA provides a method for removing fish from the calculation if they are not present in the waterbody; however, using the same methodology, EPA also recommended updating the selenium standard in the water column from 5 to 3. The DEP rules bundle requires Legislative approval. We will continue to pressure the state to adopt EPA's recommendation to strengthen the water column standard for selenium.

**Regional Watershed Restoration.** As the state lead for the Choose Clean Water Coalition, we commented on the renewal of the Chesapeake Bay agreement to strengthen the goals that provide the blueprint for improving water quality in the Potomac headwaters. On the other side of the state, we helped create the Healthy Waters Coalition to seek federal designation for restoration of the Ohio River Watershed. We hosted a meeting in Huntington to discuss the Ohio River Restoration Plan and went to DC to convey support to our federal representatives. We hosted meetings with legislators from PA, WV and MD to gain support for the Ohio River Restoration and will be supporting a state resolution in the upcoming Legislative Session.



# Improving Water Policy: Addressing Toxic Pollution

**PFAS Pollution.** The EPA Government to Government grant that supported our work to develop PFAS Action plans in partnership with WVDEP was suspended for 5 months. Once the grant was reinstated, we were able to get back on track with community outreach. To engage communities on PFAS Action Planning, we hosted 8 community meetings in the Eastern and Northern Panhandles and 2 virtual meetings reaching approximately 400 people across the 10 meetings. We will continue to discuss potential sources of PFAS and how to reduce exposure with communities as action plans are released in 2026.



*A WV Rivers' team member collects a PFAS sample from a popular roadside spring.*



# Improving Water Policy: Holding Polluters Accountable

**Petrochemical Pollution.** WV Rivers took legal action to reduce PFAS discharges at Chemours' Washington Works facility. Represented by Appalachian Mountain Advocates, we filed a citizen suit for violating the Clean Water Act and requested an injunction to stop the unlawful discharges of PFAS at the Chemours Washington Works facility. The District Court Judge granted our preliminary injunction request, requiring the facility to immediately come into compliance with their PFAS discharge limits in their NPDES permit. However, Chemours appealed to the 4th Circuit Court. The injunction remains in effect while we await oral arguments in the 4th Circuit tentatively scheduled for mid-March 2026.

We submitted comments to DEP on the reissuance of the NPDES permit for the Chemours Belle facility requesting stronger discharge limits and more frequent monitoring. Based on our comments, DEP increased the frequency of monitoring pollutants from biannual to quarterly. We supported several residents in requesting a public hearing, but the request was not granted. In partnership with Black Appalachia Coalition, we attended a community meeting on the potential impacts of the Clean Seas advanced recycling facility proposed in Quincy, WV. We continue to track permits for current and proposed chemical facilities.



*Image of the Chemours Belle Plant along the Kanawha River.*



A photograph of a headwater stream in a dense forest. The stream flows from the top center towards the bottom of the frame, surrounded by mossy rocks and vibrant green foliage. The background is filled with tall trees and a thick canopy of leaves.

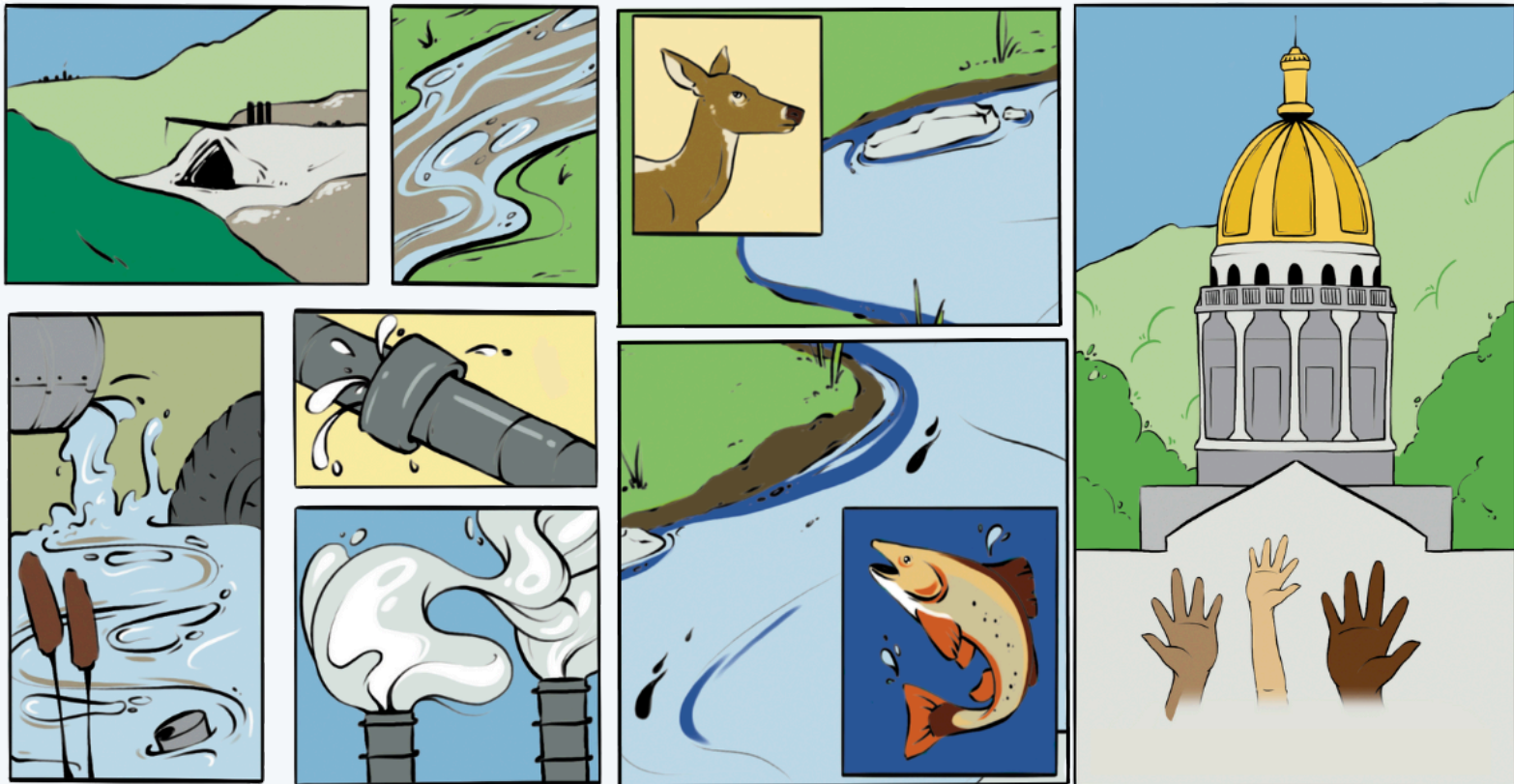
## Public Lands & Headwaters Protection

**West Virginia Public Lands Alliance (WVPL).** WV Rivers continues to facilitate the WVPL consisting of 95 members and individuals from 25 groups across the state that work together to protect state and federal public lands. We advocated together during the legislative session to prevent ATVs on public lands and protect state lands from carbon storage development projects. We also submitted comments on the Roadless Rule with 500+ individuals.

**Build Support for the Protection of Public Lands.** We partnered with the WV State Parks to host “Wild and Well” events across the state on National Public Lands Day promoting the essential value of public lands to physical and mental health. We hosted “Create the Mon” in Marlinton showcasing artists whose work was inspired by public lands. Over 50 people submitted art and attended the event. We hired two part-time contractors over the summer to build business support for the protection of public lands. Keep your eye out for our stickers “We catch business from public lands” at businesses across the Mon Forest!

**Permanent Safeguards for Waterways within the Monongahela National Forest.** We met with the Washington DC staff of Senator Capito, Senator Justice, Representative Miller, and Representative Moore to share progress in building local support to permanently protect 16 waterways in the Mon Forest through the Wild and Scenic River Act. We launched a new website [wwaterways.org](http://wwaterways.org) and an online petition to demonstrate public support with over 700 signers. Help us reach 1,000 before we go to DC this spring. Sign the petition at [wwaterways.org](http://wwaterways.org).





## Climate and Energy Justice

**WV Climate Alliance.** WV Rivers serves on the coordinating committee of a broad-based coalition of 20+ environmental, faith-based, civil rights, and civic organizations working to advance science-based climate solutions for West Virginia. In 2025, we participated in the Alliance's annual meeting and helped form working groups to strengthen coordination, align priorities, and support collective action across the state. WV Rivers contributed to the following working groups: Just Transition, Climate Policy, Community Engagement, and Technical and Legal.

The Alliance's work is grounded in three core pillars of reform. First, climate justice, centering communities that have borne the brunt of the fossil fuel economy and ensuring climate solutions address long-standing environmental and public health harms. Second, a true transition for coal miners and other fossil fuel workers likely to be impacted by the shift to a low-carbon economy, with attention to dignity, economic security, and community stability. Third, achieving a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, consistent with the findings of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, through policies and actions rooted in science and accountability.

We worked with researchers from Northeastern University and State University of New York to study what a just transition looks like for our communities. The following pages highlight the project- and industry-specific climate campaigns and initiatives WV Rivers advanced in 2025, translating these shared principles into on-the-ground action and targeted advocacy across West Virginia.



Top: Illustrative panels from our *Environmental Justice Zine* designed by Séamus Rionann.  
Bottom: Members of the WV WV Climate Alliance gather for the annual meeting at Chief Logan State Park.



## Climate and Energy Justice

**Coal Mining Pollution.** We commented on two coal mining permits in Wyoming and Boone Counties. One would increase mine water discharge into Indian Creek, where the ongoing Wyoming County water crisis continues to impact residents, and another would bury three miles of headwater streams in Boone County. The comments highlighted community concerns, potential water quality impacts, and the need for stronger environmental oversight. We supported community members in Wyoming County in requesting a public hearing and provided residents with talking points for making public comments. We met with DEP leadership to discuss the ongoing water crisis in Wyoming County and relayed resident's concerns and the need for immediate action. Following the meeting, DEP announced that it was revoking the company's permits and bonds and planning remedial action.

**Oil and Gas Pollution.** We are working collaboratively across the region with groups from VA, PA and OH to combat oil and gas pollution. We presented the Mountain Valley Pipeline Stream and Wetland Crossings report to the WV Environmental Protection Advisory Council with recommendations for DEP to increase monitoring efforts and require trenchless feasibility analysis. With MVP's plans to boost the capacity of the pipeline, we partnered with WV Citizen Action Group to install air monitoring devices at residences near the MVP compressor stations in WV. We submitted comments to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and DEP with 500+ individuals taking action with us to ask agencies to protect communities from methane gas pollution. We continue to support impacted community members and landowners connecting them with resources as they experience pollution from fracking.

**Blue Ammonia.** In collaboration with the West Virginia Citizen Action Group and other allies, we created a comprehensive community-friendly guide and a fact sheet with information about blue ammonia's impact on water and aquatic life. We canvassed the community near the proposed Adams Fork Blue Ammonia facility and co-hosted several community meetings with partners where residents received additional resources, information on potential environmental and public health impacts, and opportunities to advocate for the protection of their community.

**Class VI Carbon Injection Wells.** Represented by Appalachian Mountain Advocates, we filed a petition challenging the EPA's decision to grant primacy to WV to regulate carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) wells and submitted a formal briefing presenting arguments on how WV is ill-equipped to regulate CCS wells.

**Data Centers.** Following the passage of the data center bill in the 2025 Legislative Session, we learned of 4 data centers proposed for WV, all of which are powered by fossil fuels. For the facilities' air permits in Mason, Mingo and Tucker Counties, we worked with community members to secure public hearings and provided the community with questions and concerns to raise during the hearing. We met with the DEP Cabinet Secretary and the Data Center Liaison to ask questions about safeguarding water resources. We are working with partners across the state and region to get ahead of the data center buildout to ensure communities and water resources are protected from these large-scale developments.



# 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.

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 Basin Restoration Program was introduced in October.

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 2025, we awarded nearly \$50,000 to 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.

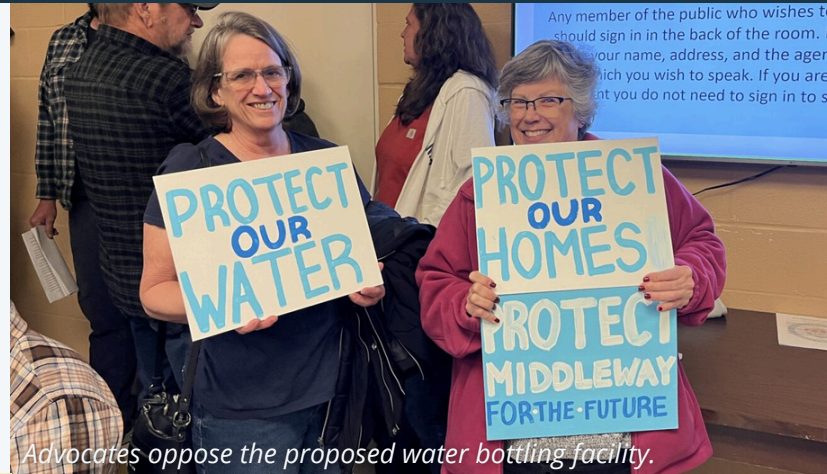




# Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**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 regular meetings of Safe Water Harpers Ferry, including supporting local resistance to a proposed water bottling facility that would have used a significant amount of groundwater resources. The water bottling facility's proposal was rejected, but other threats to groundwater, including a data center proposal, are still a possibility in the Eastern Panhandle. We supported a grant application to allow Elks Run to have their own staff, which will allow them to move forward with more projects like riparian plantings.

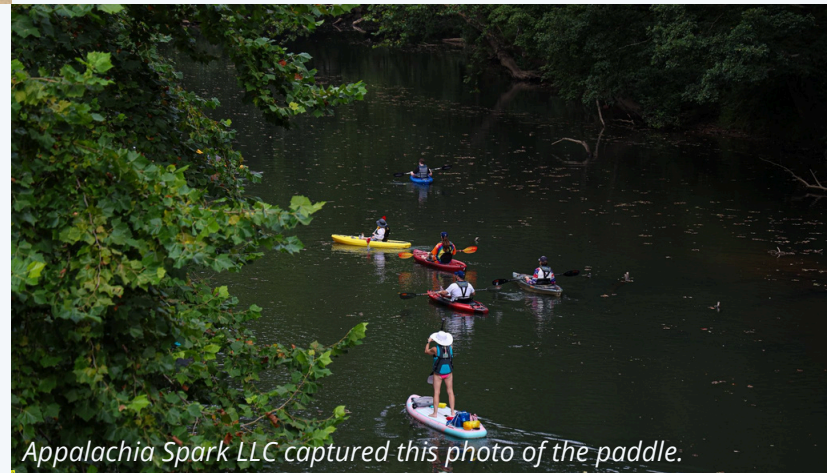


*Advocates oppose the proposed water bottling facility.*



*U.S. Forest Service did a demonstration at First Friday!*

**Buckhannon:** We supported the Buckhannon River Watershed Association's feasibility study to identify wastewater treatment options that reduce fecal coliform bacteria. By providing match funding for BRWA to contract with Downstream Strategies, they were able to develop a treatment plan for Bull Run. Our team hosted an informational table at Buckhannon RiverFest. The event had 150 attendee and included activities like a river float and yoga.



*Appalachia Spark LLC captured this photo of the paddle.*



*PAN & WV Rivers staff serving up two kinds of chili!*

**Fayetteville:** In partnership with Plateau Action Network (PAN), we expanded public awareness of water issues through clean ups and local events: hosting New River-themed trivia, participating in the Bridge Day Chili Cook-Off, and supporting the second annual WV Youth Film Festival. We co-hosted Conservation Day with the New River Conservancy in the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve, pulling together 8 national, state, regional, and local partners for a day of family friendly conservation activities and a special screening of *The Lorax*.



# Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**Volunteer Stream Monitoring.** WV Rivers expanded community-based water quality monitoring in 2025, supporting residents in documenting pollution and protecting local waterways. We hosted two monitoring trainings in Greenbrier and Wyoming Counties, and volunteers submitted 310 observations to the citizen science database. At DEP's request, we also contributed 724 community stream surveys collected between 2022 and 2024 for Clean Water Act reporting (the 303(b)/303(d) Integrated Report).

Community members used the West Virginia Stream Watch App to report pollution concerns and monitoring data, submitting 42 reports in 2025. Three resulted in formal complaints to DEP, including a fourth-quarter submission from Fifteenmile Fork that prompted inspectors to collect water quality samples and investigate the source of acid mine drainage runoff.

In Jefferson County, WV Rivers supported baseline monitoring at Turkey Run, which flows from Lake Louisa — one of the state's largest limestone springs — into Opequon Creek and the Potomac River. Facing potential impacts from a proposed water bottling facility, volunteers with Protect Middleway conducted 17 surveys in just a few months, collecting data on turbidity, pH, conductivity, and water temperature to establish baseline conditions.

We also launched a new monitoring program in Tucker County focused on a proposed data center, partnering with Friends of Blackwater, Friends of Cheat, Tucker United, and the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy to document potential water impacts early. In addition, WV Rivers continued work to protect trout streams, collaborating with Trout Unlimited, WVDNR, and DEP to expand the state's list of designated Trout Waters (B2 streams) using new electrofishing data to strengthen water quality protections.

After years of eDNA sample collections and meetings with the WV Wild Trout Collaborative, WV Rivers helped secure the addition of 73 new Trout Waters to DEP's designated trout streams list strengthening water quality standards across the state. This designation adds more than 173 miles of protected streams across the West Virginia highlands, including waters in the Cheat, Greenbrier, Elk, Gauley, and Potomac subbasins.



*A water quality sample is collected during the float at the 2025 Watershed Symposium.*





*The West Virginia Watershed Network gathers for a photo at the 2025 Symposium.*

## Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

**West Virginia Watershed Network.** WV Rivers believes that protecting water in West Virginia requires strong local leadership in every watershed. That's why we support the West Virginia Watershed Network (WVWN)—a statewide network that connects watershed groups, builds skills, and strengthens on-the-ground work to improve local streams and rivers.

In October, WVWN hosted the West Virginia Watershed Symposium in Philippi, convening 70 attendees representing 19 watershed groups and 22 partner organizations, in partnership with Friends of the Cheat and the WV Department of Environmental Protection. Programming included legislative updates, a funding panel, restoration project presentations, and a Stream Watch presentation by WV Rivers' Senior Scientist. WV Rivers also supports WVWN's year-round connection and learning through monthly Watershed Social Hours and the quarterly WaterNet newsletter. In 2025, the Network also secured the West Virginia Watershed Network domain name and developed the framework for a new website in partnership with Friends of the Cheat.

A key part of WVWN's work is recognizing — and investing in — watershed groups doing critical local work for their waters through annual awards, each paired with \$1,000 in support. This year's awardees include:

- **Headwaters Hero Award:** Buckhannon River Watershed Association & Save the Tygart Watershed Association
- **Restoration Rockstar Award:** Paint Creek Watershed Association
- **Rookie of the Year Award:** Twelvepole Creek Rising
- **Stream Smarts Award:** Piney Creek Watershed Association
- **Watershed Guardian Award:** Greenbrier River Watershed Association

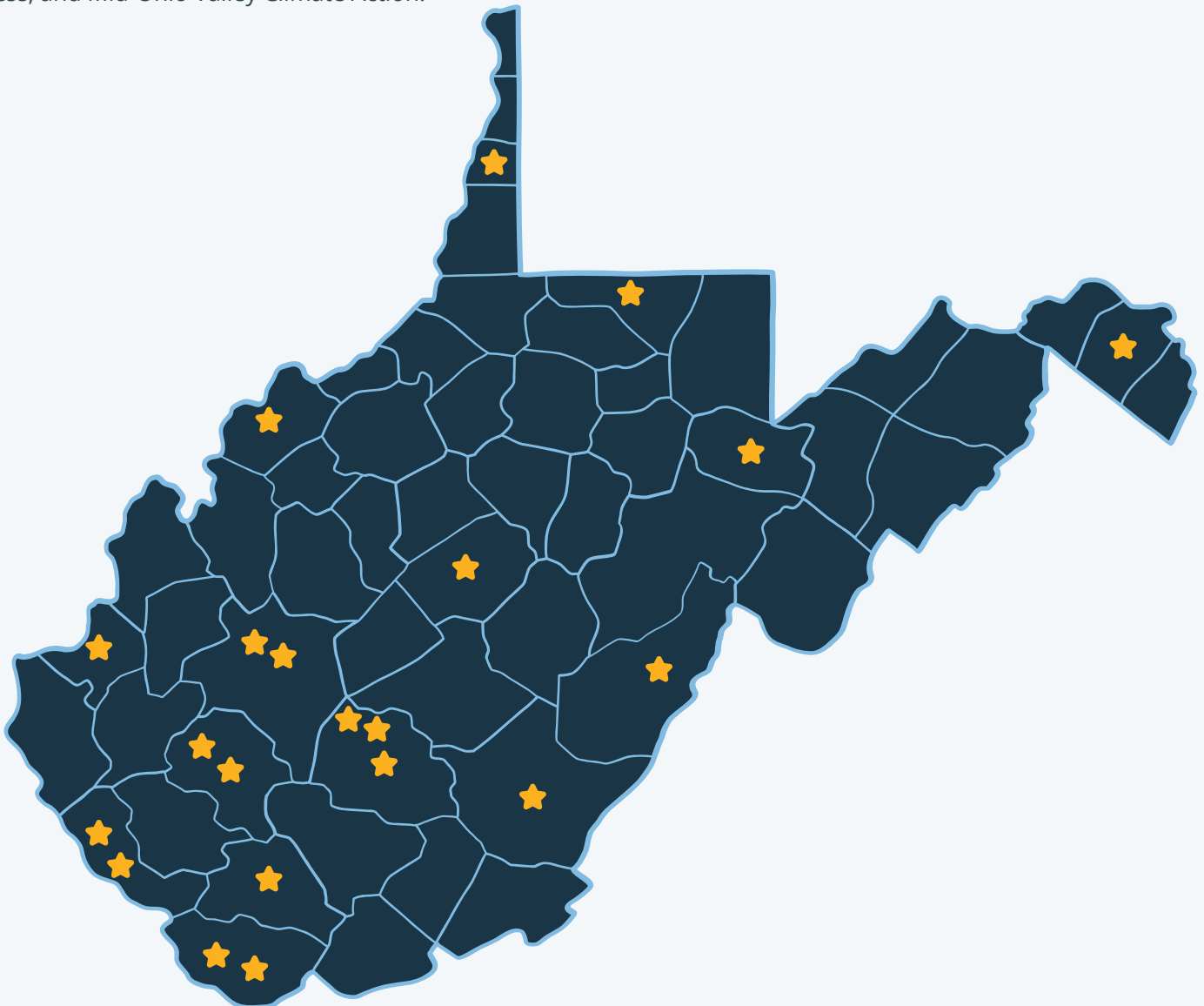
These awards reflect a simple truth: local watershed groups are often the first to notice problems, the most trusted messengers in their communities, and the ones who keep showing up month after month to monitor, educate, restore, and advocate for clean water.

To better understand how WV Rivers can support this work, Senior Scientist Than Hitt conducted a watershed needs survey at the Symposium, asking groups across the state about their biggest science and technical gaps. Watershed leaders consistently identified a need for stronger support in monitoring and data interpretation, GIS and mapping tools, access to key datasets (from hydrology to biology to climate), and specialized trainings like QAPP development, AMD treatment, and stream science. Groups also emphasized how important partnerships are, naming WV Rivers as a key source of science support.



## Empowering Communities and Grassroots Organizations

These grants supported hands-on projects like community water quality monitoring in Wyoming County, air quality monitoring led by local advocates, and rain barrel workshops and kits that help residents manage stormwater at home. We funded environmental education efforts — from Trout in the Classroom programs and watershed celebrations in coalfield communities to student advocacy at Environmental Day at the Capitol. Other grants helped groups convene healing and listening sessions, resist harmful industrial proposals, pilot innovative remediation strategies, and build long-term organizational capacity through leadership development and grassroots communications tools.







## Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who supported WV Rivers in 2025 — our donors, volunteers, members, and partners. Your support helped us reach more communities across West Virginia, strengthen local watershed groups, expand community water monitoring, and show up for residents working to protect clean water and public health.

As we look ahead, we're guided by a simple truth: when communities have the tools and support they need, they lead and real change follows. We're grateful to be in this work with you.

For clean water & healthy communities  
— All of us at WV Rivers Coalition