



New River Currents

The Newsletter of the **New River Group** of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club

Fall/Winter 2005

Letter from the Chair

Good times were had on our spring and summer outings. We greeted spring on a clear chilly day at the Cascades. Three weeks later, we plunged down Brush Mountain to Craig Creek, following the course of a branch that sometimes disappeared underground before re-emerging. June 11 was down Little Rockcastle Creek and up the gorge to a mountaintop pasture. Along the way we picnicked at the ruins of a 1930s Civilian Conservation Corps camp amidst the blooming mountain laurel. When no one showed for the June 12 Carroll County trip, I canoed the middle section of Chestnut Creek with my little dog and hiked back up along New River Trail. This section is great for the beginner whitewater boater. July 24, we escaped summer's heat up Johns Creek in Mountain Lake Wilderness.

I missed most of you on these outings, but I hope you'll join us for some of our upcoming events. We have another good lineup of outings,

including opportunities to give back with road and streamside cleanups.

I would also like to see enough participation that we can effectively organize our awareness of the many environmental issues challenging the New River Valley. My vision is that each of us can focus on a particular issue, helping the group to stay informed on a range of environmental topics. In this way, we will be better prepared to address threats and opportunities in a timely way, particularly given the range of issues that affect our region.

For example, did you know Virginia Tech and Appalachian Power resist the expense of improving the air emissions at their electric generating plants? Delegate Jack Reid introduced a bill to require all Virginia fossil fuel electricity-generating plants to improve their air emissions. The utilities told the General Assembly they would shut down their plants if such a bill passed.

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Local Profile

Each issue of the newsletter profiles a local individual (or group) who has contributed significantly to the environmental well-being of our area.

Bob Munson

Bob Munson is Planning Bureau Manager for Virginia's Department of Conservation and Recreation, which runs our state parks. I first met him at a field session on developing new paddlesport access to Cushaw Lake on James River. Bob was willing to go beyond what we paddlers were asking and propose taking the Dominion Power dam down entirely!

Since then I have met with Bob and others as he develops the three-state New River Blueway, providing access and services to those paddling the New River throughout its length. Bob put together a rails-to-trails project on abandoned Norfolk Southern tracks in Southside Virginia near Farmville's High Bridge.

Bob is a state worker with vision and determination. Sometimes he pleads his case to unsympathetic local officials. We can do our part by being sure these local officials see the opportunity and advantage in providing places we can enjoy the outdoors free from the sound and smell of gas motors.

At the National Level

The Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2005

In July, U.S. Rep Jay Inslee (D-WA) and Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) introduced legislation to restore protection to roadless areas in national forests.

Said Inslee, "Americans have overwhelmingly expressed their preference for preserving these pristine roadless areas. ... Instead of clear-cutting these forests with chainsaws, we should be preserving these crown jewels in our national heritage for future generations. We should also

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Outings & Meetings

Meetings and outings are open to Sierra Club members and guests. Newcomers are welcome. For outings, please be sure you are dressed and equipped appropriately for the activity and the day's weather. Please contact Outings Chair Dave Jenkins (540/552-3747) or Group Chair David Bernard (540/951-2716) prior to the outing.

Wednesday September 21

3rd Wednesdays at 5 ~ Meet at 5pm at More Than Coffee, a Lebanese restaurant at the corner of North Main and College in downtown Blacksburg. We will take care of any immediate Sierra Club business, catch up on environmental news, and enjoy the good company. A regular get-together for the New River Group.

Sunday September 25

Hike into Big Survey southeast of Wytheville. Meet at 10am at McDonald's parking lot at I-81 exit 70. Easy hike into a mountainous area close to town that was protected due to efforts of Liza Field and other local environmentalists. Blacksburg area members meet at Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall at 8:45am to carpool.

Saturday October 15

Moderate hike to Dragon's Tooth, an outstanding high point along the Appalachian Trail. Meet at 9am at Blacksburg Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall to carpool or be at trailhead along VA 311 near Craig County-Roanoke County line at 10am. The final part of the ascent is rocky with steep cliffs alongside.

Wednesday October 19

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

Wednesday October 26

General membership meeting; 7pm at Blacksburg Public Library (400 Draper Road, downtown). Please come as we make plans for the upcoming year. Bring a snack or beverage if you like. If you can't make it, please get in touch beforehand to offer your suggestions.

Sunday November 6

Easy hike along New River Trail beginning at Foster Falls. Meet at Foster Falls Pavilion at 10:30am or meet to carpool at Blacksburg Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall at 9am or Love's Travel Plaza at I-81 exit 84 at 10am. We will walk downstream. With the leaves fallen, we can scout an enjoyable section of the New River to float and view the imposing houses sprouting up in this (formerly) remote area.

Sunday November 13

Cleanup alongside Big Reed Island Creek. Meet at 10am at the McDonald's at I-81 exit 98. Empty pickups welcome. We will travel up this longest of the New River's tributaries that come in above Claytor Lake. Contact David Bernard.

Wednesday November 16

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

Saturday December 10

Hike through the Congaree Swamp National Monument just east of Columbia, SC. Our closest subtropical ecosystem is also the Southeast's finest; an enormous bottomland hardwood forest containing a dozen national champion trees and a wide variety of other flora and fauna. One of these, the mosquito, is usually inactive this time of year. Contact

David Bernard to plan this early winter getaway to the land of palmettos and Spanish moss.

Wednesday December 21

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

Wednesday January 18

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

Saturday January 28

Hike up John's Creek in Mountain Lake Wilderness. Weather-dependent moderate hike up the Chesapeake Bay's westernmost source. Meet at Blacksburg Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall at 9am or be at the trailhead at 10am.

Sunday January 29

Cleanup alongside Big Walker Creek. Meet at Blacksburg Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall at 9 am or be at New River canoe launch under US460 bridge below Ripplemead at 10am. Contact David Bernard.

Wednesday February 15.

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

General membership meeting, 7pm at Blacksburg Library, 400 Draper Road. Bring snacks and drinks if you like. We will nominate candidates for group officers, with elections to follow after the Spring-Summer newsletter comes out.

Wednesday March 15

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See Sept. 21)

Friday March 17

St. Patrick's Day. Avoid the crowds and take this moderate hike up to Cascades in the afternoon. Meet at Blacksburg Easy Chair Coffeeshop at University Mall at 1 pm or be at the trailhead at 2 pm.

National *(from p. 1)*

address the backlog of existing road projects in our national forests instead of giving road construction subsidies at the expense of American taxpayers."

Chairman Boehlert added, "National forests are assets of concern to citizens throughout the United States, because they belong to all of us. By protecting currently roadless areas in national forests, we can ensure that they will continue to provide sources of clean drinking water, undisturbed habitats for fish and wildlife, and recreational opportunities."

The bill would prohibit most new road construction in roadless areas, but would allow road building for fire fighting, fuel reduction and when other natural disasters threaten public safety. The bill also allows full access for recreational activities such as backpacking, camping, hunting and fishing.

For more information, see http://safc.org/campaigns/roadless/roadless_rule.php

Local & Regional

Wilderness Bill Proposed ~ Letters of Support Needed

Nearly 55,000 acres of national forest in Southwest Virginia would be designated as wilderness or national scenic areas under legislation introduced in April by Representative Rick Boucher and Senator John Warner.

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005 proposes to create seven new wilderness areas and two new national scenic areas, and expand six existing wilderness areas in various counties within the Jefferson National Forest. The bill also directs the Forest Service to develop appropriate trail plans for the wilderness and national scenic areas.

Hearings for the proposed bill begin after the August recess. Support from Senator Allen would help the effort to pass this legislation.

Please write Senator Allen asking him to co-sponsor The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005:

**The Honorable George Allen
3140 Chaparrel Drive
Bldg C, Suite 101
Roanoke VA 24018**

Wilderness designation helps to safeguard watersheds, preserve critical wildlife habitat, and prevent soil erosion. Located near the growing population centers of southwestern Virginia, the wilderness areas also provide opportunities for solitude, wilderness recreation, and spiritual renewal.

Hiking, camping, hunting, fishing and other recreational activities would be continued in the new wilderness areas; mountain bikes are permitted in national scenic areas.

The bill establishes a continuous non-motorized trail between County Route 650 and Forest Development Road 4018 for mountain bike, equestrian, and hiking use.

The Forest Service and the boards of supervisors for the respective counties have endorsed these proposed designations.

New Wilderness Areas:

- **Brush Mountain, Montgomery County (4,794 acres).** Adjacent to Blacksburg, this area extends approximately 8 miles along the northwest slope of Brush Mountain. Despite its proximity to Blacksburg, the property provides a feeling of true wilderness solitude.
- **Brush Mountain East, Craig County (3,769 acres).** Adjacent to the above area, this tract has excellent views along Craig Creek and Brush Mountain's steep face.
- **Garden Mountain, Bland County (3,291 acres).** This tract extends along the south face of Garden Mountain. The Appalachian Trail parallels the northern boundary along the summit, while the Lick Trail provides access to the valley bottom.
- **Hunting Camp Creek, Bland County (8,470 acres).** Adjacent to the above area, and traversed by the Appalachian Trail, this area includes the valleys of Hunting Camp Creek and Little Wolf Creek. Both creek valleys show evidence of past workings of beaver, including old dams and chains of marshy areas.
- **Lynn Camp Creek, Bland County (3,226 acres).** This area includes the northern slope of Brushy Mountain, a steep ridge descending

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Local & Regional (from p. 3)

to the tranquil creek. Two trails traverse the area: the Appalachian Trail moves from south to north, while the Lynn Camp Trail follows the creek from east to west.

- **Stone Mountain, Lee County.** This 3,270-acre tract adjacent to the North Fork of the Powell River is considered to be one of the least disturbed forests in all of Southwest Virginia and is home to populations of two rare salamanders. The Stone Mountain and Payne Branch trails are part of, and provide convenient access to, the area; the trails are also connected to an adjacent campground at Cave Springs.
- **Raccoon Branch, Smyth County (4,223 acres).** In the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, this extremely rugged tract is characterized by high ridges and low streams. Eight major trails provide access, and two nearby campgrounds serve as convenient trailheads. Additionally, 4.5 miles of the Appalachian Trail traverse the area.

Expansion of Wilderness Areas:

- Peters Mountain (1,203 acres)
- Mountain Lake, (5,476 acres)

- Shawvers Run (2,456 acres)
- Lewis Fork (308 acres)
- Little Wilson Creek (1845 acres)
- Kimberling Creek (612 acres)

New National Scenic Areas:

- **Bear Creek, Smyth County (5,503 acres).** This area extends from the crest of Walker Mountain southward to the crest of Brushy Mountain and includes the enclosed valley between the two mountains. An extensive network of trails is included in the proposed area, including more than four miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.
- **Seng Mountain, Smyth County (6,455 acres).** In the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, this area includes Rowland Creek Falls, as well as a network of recreational trails. Convenient access is provided via the Hurricane Campground and Skulls Gap Picnic Area.

For additional information, see the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition's website, www.safc.org/campaigns/va_wilderness_bill.php.

The Chair (from p. 1)

Did you know the Radford Army Ammunition Plant and Celanese are among the top ten toxic polluters in Virginia? Or that uncontrolled development and agriculture continue to degrade water quality?

These are just a few of the many issues that concern our region. If we maintain a core organization, knowledge of potential environmental impacts, and contact with key officials, we can ensure the environment is at least considered by decisionmakers.

There are about 400 Sierra Club members in the New River Group (17,000 in all Virginia). Your support is greatly appreciated, but make no mistake; your dues alone are not going to provide the environmentally sensible society we all desire. There are good people at state agencies, but they have restraints from the top and need the questions, prodding, and support we provide. No one from Sierra Club national headquarters, or any other big environmental group, is going to swoop in and save us if we don't identify the issues and show some knowledge and tenacity.

David Bernard

<http://www.virginia.sierracub.org/newriver/>

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