

# NEW RIVER CURRENTS

Spring 2009

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SIERRA  
CLUB [HTTP://VIRGINIA.SIERRACLUB.ORG/NEWRIVER/](http://virginia.sierraclub.org/newriver/)



## Letter from the Chair:

### *Opportunities Abound!*

Greetings from your new chair! At our quarterly business meeting last fall, we took care of our annual elections and rearranged our positions somewhat. After several years as our leader, David Bernard is moving on to more responsibilities at the state level, continuing as Water Quality Chair for the Virginia Chapter, representing us on the political committee, and accepting an appointment on the Coal Combustion Byproduct Technical Advisory Committee convened by the Virginia DEQ. David will be going back and forth between Blacksburg and Richmond a lot, and therefore has relinquished the local leadership position to me. I hope to be able to tackle it with as much dedication as David has shown! We also welcomed Bruce Grimes to our executive committee. Bruce is an ardent bird and butterfly enthusiast, and has been working on forest conservation issues.

It's been a busy fall and winter. In addition

## Feedback Needed on Energy Position

By David Bernard

Below is a resolution I propose the New River Group adopt. It was suggested by a member of our EXCOM last November and several other activists have expressed support. We want our general membership to consider it before the EXCOM passes it.

Taxing fossil fuels has been considered the kiss of death in American politics. In the 1990's a group of Democratic US senators suggested imposing a 50 cent per gallon gasoline tax to raise revenue, reduce

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to outings to Rock Castle Gorge, the Cascades, and Bottom Creek, we've run two clean ups, one on each side of the New River at McCoy, and coordinated a showing of the movie *Kilowatt Ours* with the Blacksburg Public Library. We also ran an informational meeting with the Concerned Citizens of Giles at the Blacksburg Public Library to continue our support of their fight against the Cumberland Park Fly Ash Project.

As always, however, there's plenty room for more enthusiastic help keeping on top of local issues and encouraging conservation practices in the area. Feel free to email me with suggestions and concerns! -*Maria Bowling*  
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demand, and provide incentives for renewable energy. Sen. Chuck Robb was defeated by George Allen in 2000. Sen. John Kerry was defeated by Pres. George Bush in 2004. Both George's mocked their opponents for having previously supported this gas tax. I cite this example not to raise the issue of partisan politics, but to educate as to the USA's reluctance to take this step that has long been a part of western European and Japanese economies.

Please see *Energy Position* on page 2

## *Energy position, cont.*

Many economists and other intellectuals have said that a fossil fuel tax is the best way to provide incentives for efficiency, conservation, and the development and deployment of renewable sources of energy. Yet, not only politicians but environmental groups have not wanted to endorse fossil fuel taxes. I have brought the issue to the leadership of the Virginia Chapter of Sierra Club and been politely rebuffed. It is a fact that despite the growing interest in going “green,” and the steady development of ever-better renewable technologies, fossil fuel consumption continues to climb in the USA. If the New River Group were to pass a resolution in favor of fossil fuel taxes, it would be a signal to Sierra Club leadership that the membership is not averse to this policy. However, since it is important that we speak for our whole group, we need to get feedback from as many members as possible.

It is important to stop burning fossil fuels quickly. The Executive Committee of the New River Group of Sierra Club favors a federal law that would tax or otherwise put a floor under the price of fossil fuels. We believe that this is necessary to provide incentives for the development and deployment of energy-efficient energy use technologies and renewable energy production, as well as conservation measures. We are well aware that this will pose a hardship on many consumers, and favor using a portion of the revenues from this tax to reduce income taxes or otherwise assist lower-income Americans in a way that does not remove their incentive to conserve energy. Currently, the energy provided by fossil fuels does not take the cost of either depletion or global warming into consideration. Production and use of fossil fuels is subsidized in many other ways, too, such as pollution allowances, health care

costs, transportation subsidies, damage to the environment where fossil fuels are extracted, and the cost of a foreign policy focused on countries rich in fossil fuels. We believe that serious reduction of fossil fuel use can only begin as the true cost of burning fossil fuel is included in the consumer cost of these fuels. We recognize that harmful collateral effects of such taxes must also be considered, such as the incentives fossil fuel taxes would provide to biofuels.

Environmental groups have been reluctant to advocate for measures that would increase energy costs for Americans, but because these costs would provide important conservation incentives, we would like to see that change.

## You Can Help Us Save Paper and Money

The economic crisis has hit the Sierra Club as it has other organizations and businesses. Incoming funds are down, but, of course, expenses are steady or increasing. Our group stands to see a reduction in funds from the state chapter, funds which basically cover no more than our newsletters.

The most obvious solution for us is one we’ve been discussing for some time—transmitting the newsletter online to as many folks as we can. If you receive our monthly newsletter, please contact us if you **do not** wish to receive the newsletter through email. If you are not on that list and wish to receive the newsletter online, please go to our website at <http://virginia.sierraclub.org/newriver/> and sign up. You’ll be doing the group and a lot of trees a big favor!

## Appreciating the Work of the Nature Conservancy at Bottom Creek

By Maria Bowling

Our Bottom Creek hike in April was a new one for all of us, excepting the scouting hike I took the week before, and it was well worth braving the chill of a cloudy early spring day.

The group was a varied one, with friends from many hikes joined by a couple from Galax, a new friend from Floyd, and even a couple of students from the newly formed environmental awareness group at Pulaski County High School.

The biggest draw on this hike is the 200 foot waterfall at the end of the main trail, the second to the left winds along the creek with great views and highest in the state, but the trail that branches off



access to the rock-strewn headwaters of the the hollow, where old homestead sites and tenement houses stimulate the imagination.

Several rare fish and plants are protected by the site, including the bigeye jumprock and chestnut lipfern, and it hosts 10% of all known Virginia fish species.

If a visit to Bottom Creek is in your future, Google Bottom Creek Gorge for directions, but be forewarned, the Conservancy asks that you leave your dogs at home.

## Southwest VA Forests Receive New Protections

by David Jenkins

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act became law on March 30, 2009, creating 6 new wilderness areas, a wilderness study area, 2 new scenic areas as well as expanding 6 existing wilderness areas in the Jefferson National Forest. This huge addition to protected areas in southwest Virginia is the result of years of effort by Rep. Boucher and Sen. Warner and many others in local environmental groups who generated support for the legislation.

The protected areas include:

- Stone Mountain Wilderness Area, in Lee County
- Bear Creek National Scenic Area, in Smyth County
- Lynn Camp Creek Wilderness Study Area, in Bland County
- Garden Mountain Wilderness Area, in Bland County
- Hunting Camp Creek Wilderness Area, in Bland County
- Brush Mountain East Wilderness Area, in Craig County
- Raccoon Branch Wilderness Area, in Smyth County
- Seng Mountain National Scenic Area, in Smyth County
- Shawvers Run Wilderness Addition, in Craig County

*con't p.4*

## Transportation Update

By Tom Hoffman

It looks as though the new Amtrak train between Lynchburg and Washington is really going to happen. I had my misgivings, based on the state's financial problems, but it appears the service will start in the fall. It will leave Lynchburg early in the morning. One report said 7am but another said 5am. Five is much too early for most people, especially if they're coming from the New River Valley. I'm not sure whether the same coaches will operate through to New York, but if not, other trains leave Washington at least once per hour for points north.

An additional train between Richmond and Washington is also planned, but that will start later on, and would be of limited use to Southwest Virginia residents in any

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*Southwest VA Forests* from page 3

- Mountain Lake Wilderness Addition, in Craig County, Giles County, Va. & Monroe County, Peters Mountain Wilderness Addition, in Giles County
- Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Addition, in Grayson County
- Lewis Fork Wilderness Addition, in Grayson County, &
- Kimberling Creek Wilderness Addition, in Bland County

Established by Congress, wilderness areas are permanently preserved by law in their natural condition, with multiple benefits for clean water, backcountry recreation and old-growth habitat. The areas are protected from logging, road construction, and mining. Recreation in wilderness areas includes hiking, camping, fishing, and hunting.

Maps and photos of the new areas can be found at <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org/news/VirginiaRidgeandValleyAct.html>.

*Transportation* from page 3

event. However, one has to start somewhere. An additional train between Richmond and Washington is also planned, but that will start later on, and would be of limited use to Southwest Virginia residents in any event. As a passenger rail advocate, I'm very pleased by these developments.

Christiansburg is investigating expanding bus service in the town. At present, only Blacksburg Transit's "Two Town Trolley" goes to Christiansburg. It runs from the mall to the county government center at infrequent intervals, and is not well patronized. The town is administering a survey to investigate how to make the bus service more efficient.

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