



# New River Currents

The Newsletter of the **New River Group** of the Virginia Chapter of the Sierra Club **Spring/Summer '06**

## Letter from the Chair

At last year's Sierra Club Summit, delegates decided that "Building a New Energy Future" should be the club's top priority over the next five years. The next highest ranking priorities were "Building Vibrant, Healthy Communities," "Defending Federal Lands/Public Waters," and "Protecting People and the Planet from Pollution." These national priorities mesh perfectly with our needs in the New River Valley.

Appalachian Power Company (APCO) made an investment in clean energy way back as 1913, when they built the first of their three hydroelectric dams on the New River. However, they could do better with their coal-fired generators. Instead of going ahead with modern cleaning technology at the Glen Lyn power plant when pollution-reduction rules were introduced in 2000, APCO waited for the weakened standards put out in 2005, and says they plan no further improvements at Glen Lyn (see **Mercury Road Trip**, p. 2). APCO also has

not committed to only buying coal that is produced safely and without the large-scale destruction of mountain-top mining. We must continue to push for clean energy measures in the New River Valley.

Transportation improvements can reduce both the need for fossil fuels and the pollution that results from burning them. Investing in alternatives to personal autos and trucks for transportation is one of the important steps in building healthy communities. In this regard, the New River Valley is healthy in many ways: Blacksburg has an excellent public transportation system, and the bus service between Blacksburg and Christiansburg and to Roanoke has been expanded. Radford has been developing an excellent trail system. However, in the past year, bus service to many communities along I-81 was discontinued. The legislature has not made a rail alternative to I-81 vehicle traffic a priority. And, new

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## Group Elections

Elections for officers of the New River Group will be held at the next general meeting, June 21 (7pm, Blacksburg Library). Voting will be by mail-in ballot or in person. Nominations were made at the February 15 meeting, but write-in nominations of New River Group members are welcome; please note them on the ballot, and they will be recorded and announced on the listserv.

To vote by mail, cut out the ballot, circle your choices, and mail to New River Group, Sierra Club, PO Box 125, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

### ELECTION BALLOT

Chair:	David Bernard*
Vice-Chair:	Maria Bowling*
Secretary:	Rosemarie Sawdon
Treasurer:	Anton Baudoin*
Excom member:	Pat Arvin
Excom member:	Thomas Hoffman
Excom member:	David Jenkins
Newsletter editor:	Eva Brumberger*
Membership:	David Bernard
Outings:	David Bernard
Publicity:	Maria Bowling* & Pat Arvin (both)

\* also member of ExCom (Executive Committee), which makes decisions for the group between general membership meetings

## The New River Group Listserv

The New River Group maintains a listserv where we post information about meetings, activities, and environmental issues. To subscribe to the list, send an email to:

**LISTSERV@LISTS.SIERRACLUB.ORG**

Leave the subject line blank, and type the following message:

**SUB VIRGINIA-NEWRIVER-NEWS  
YourFirstName YourLastName**

Replace "YourFirstName YourLastName" with your own first and last name. This will be the name you will be known by on the list. If you have questions about the listserv, contact David Jenkins at [jenkins@vt.edu](mailto:jenkins@vt.edu)

## National

The annual national election for the Sierra Club's Board of Directors is underway. This month, you should receive in the mail your national Sierra Club ballot, which will include information on the candidates. The Sierra Club is a democratically structured organization at all levels (see "Local" for information on local group elections). The Club requires regular input on policies and priorities from its membership in order to function well.

Yearly participation in elections is one way of providing such input. The Board of Directors, which is required to stand for election, sets Club policies and budgets at the national level and works closely with the staff to operate the Club. Voting for candidates who express your views on how the Club should grow and change is both a privilege and a responsibility of membership.

To learn more about the candidates, please visit the Sierra Club's election website:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/bod/2006election>

Please take the time to read about the candidates, then make your choices and cast your votes. Ballots must be cast by the third week in April. The ballot is straightforward and easy to mark; alternatively, you can vote online.

## Local & Regional

### Mercury Road Trip

In western Giles County stands Appalachian Power Company's (APCO) Glen Lyn coal-fired electricity generating plant. It is an old plant, and small by today's standards. Its smokestack emits only partially-treated coal exhaust, and sends large quantities of sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide, and mercury downwind, that is, up Virginia's New River Valley. APCO opposed the Clean Smokestacks Bill, and says it would not be economical to install additional pollution control equipment at Glen Lyn.

Sierra Club's Josh Low, Conservation Director of the Virginia Chapter, organized a week of publicity to highlight mercury pollution from Virginia power plants. I joined Josh for his trip to Glen Lyn on March 8. He planned to present APCO with a certificate noting their contribution to mercury pollution. Neither Josh nor I announced our intentions to APCO.

We were greeted by a half dozen police cars representing four departments. We were quickly asked if we had business with APCO. Josh had a short opportunity to present his certificate, and then we were obligated to leave. I did have the opportunity to speak with the Giles County Sheriff's Department. I told them our reasons for being there, and our intentions to make APCO's current operation illegal, and that if APCO were to invest in pollution control equipment it would be a big boost to the Giles economy. I also pointed out that Sierra Club does not engage in illegal activities to make its point, and that we appreciated their service to the county, where we were soon to be hiking.

Josh presented the Giles officers with Sierra Club calendars, which they graciously accepted.

We had a good turnout that evening in Blacksburg for Josh's presentation on mercury pollution, and its severe dangers to the human nervous system, particularly in developing children.

If America's electric utilities were to go ahead and install proper pollution controls, it would save people a lot of time and trouble. There is a cost to clean energy measures; there is also a cost to respiratory health and water quality from coal combustion.

### Virginia General Assembly Scorecard

As of this writing, the Virginia General Assembly has not yet adjourned, but no one would say the environment has a majority in Richmond.

The Clean Smokestacks Bill, which would have forced Virginia coal-burning utilities to clean up more mercury, sulfur dioxide, and nitrous oxide from their emissions, and to do it sooner, was cleverly changed into a bill that obligates Virginia to conform to the Federal air pollution standards of 2005.

An omnibus energy bill that aims to facilitate siting of large energy infrastructure, such as nuclear power plants, liquefied natural gas port terminals, and power lines, was thankfully modified so as not to eliminate local zoning authority. It does, however, encourage off-shore oil and gas drilling. It passed both houses.

Please, read the newspapers, check the websites of the Sierra Club's Virginia chapter, the Virginia Conservation Network, and other sources, and let your leaders know your thoughts. Governor Kaine may veto some of the most objectionable legislation.

# Outings & Meetings, April-October 2006

Please join us for these upcoming hikes, suppers, meetings, and camping and river trips. Guests are welcome. Trip leaders like to hear from participants before the trip.

## Wednesday April 19

3rd Wednesdays at 5 ~ a regular event for the New River Group. We gather from 5-7pm at More Than Coffee, a Lebanese restaurant at 235 North Main Street in downtown Blacksburg (near the corner of Main and College). We will take care of any immediate Sierra Club business, catch up on environmental news, and enjoy the good company.

## Sunday April 23

Easy hike to Audi Murphy Monument near Appalachian Trail atop Brush Mountain. An especially good outing for youngsters. Those who wish to extend the hike can head north or south along the AT. Meet at 1pm at Kroger parking lot on University City Boulevard in Blacksburg. Trip leader David Bernard 540-392-5096.

## Wednesday May 17

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19)

## Saturday May 20

Moderate hike on the North Fork (of Big Stony Creek) Trail at Kelly Flats. Meet at 8:30am at Kroger parking lot on University City Boulevard in Blacksburg. Trip leader Dave Jenkins 540-552-3747.

## Saturday June 17

Find birds, butterflies, and dragonflies with enthusiast Bruce Grimes in Radford's Wildwood Park. Meet there at 7am. Trip leader Bruce Grimes 540-381-7028.

## Wednesday June 21

5-6:30pm: 3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19)

7pm: New River Group Membership Meeting at Blacksburg Library, 400 Draper Road. Elections will be held (see "Local Elections" in this issue.) Snacks will be served.



## Wednesday July 19

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19)

## Sunday July 30

Hike to someplace cool, literally. Call trip leader David Bernard (540-392-5096) for more information.

## Wednesday August 16

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19)

## Saturday August 19 and Sunday August 20

Beginner level canoeing on New River. The water doesn't get any more comfortable than this weekend. Trip leader David Bernard 540-392-5096. Please call at least 12 days ahead so we can get set up.

## Wednesday September 20

3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19).

## Friday through Sunday September 22-24

Camp and hike at Grayson Highlands State Park among Virginia's tallest mountains. Come up for the weekend or for a day hike. Trip leader David Bernard 540-392-5096.

## Wednesday October 18

5-6:30pm: 3rd Wednesdays at 5 (See April 19)

7pm: New River Group membership meeting at Blacksburg Library, 400 Draper Road. Snacks will be served.

## Saturday October 21

8:30 am: Hike to upper Cascades. Meet at Kroger parking lot on University City Boulevard. Trip leader Dave Jenkins 540-552-3747.

**Volunteer to lead an outing!  
It's fun! It's easy!**

## Local & Regional (from p. 2)

### GW/Jefferson Forest Tracts Potentially Eligible for Sale

The Bush administration recently proposed auctioning off thousands of acres of public land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in order to raise federal revenues. Among those parcels potentially eligible for sale are almost 6,000 acres in the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests here in Virginia. Contact your congressional representatives to voice your opinion!

Tract	County	Acres
L-14g	Alleghany	107.35
L-14n	Alleghany	109.14
S-18f	Augusta	2.08
J-1101c	Bland	920.73
J-1101d	Bland	568.29
J-1101e	Bland	141.13
J-600	Botetourt	389.65
J-136-II	Craig	28.30
J-550j	Dickenson	13.24
J-550k	Dickenson	52.66
J-729	Giles	205.14
J-245	Lee	182.99
J-253	Lee	31.80
J-381	Montgomery	68.26
J-583	Montgomery	28.58

J-602a	Montgomery	76.54
J-605b	Montgomery	111.31
J-632	Montgomery	105.48
J-329	Roanoke	121.12
J-133c	Rockbridge	0.25
J-133c-I	Rockbridge	33.65
J-526	Rockbridge	64.47
J-1059	Scott	329.58
J-1i	Scott	127.38
J-5e	Scott	168.29
J-5f	Scott	34.35
J-7b	Scott	75.77
J-1052	Smyth	105.19
J-1060	Smyth	302.81
J-1247a	Smyth	60.33
J-1247b	Smyth	204.94
J-1247c	Smyth	150.42
U-220	Smyth	200.57
U-220-I	Smyth	10.09
U-409	Smyth	307.00
J-1060	Tazewell	10.05
J-1101c	Tazewell	0.76
J-1247a	Tazewell	0.13
J-1247b	Tazewell	1.05
J-512	Wise	1.10
J-550i	Wise	50.29
J-550n	Wise	16.13
J-550o	Wise	19.99
J-550p	Wise	45.12
J-530c	Wythe	133.36

For more information, see  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/spd.html>

## The Chair (from p. 1)

commercial areas in Wytheville and Galax do not have sidewalk connections to their fine downtowns.

As critical to the health of our communities are the acres of national forest that surround us. Never has the challenge to our wild areas been greater. We have gone from the hope of expanded national forest wilderness areas through the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act to the appalling possibility of seeing vast tracts of national forest sold (see **GW/Jefferson Forest Tracts**, this page). We are fortunate that Congressman Rick Boucher is solidly against this national forest selloff, but other congressmen support the sale. Please call to thank Congressman Boucher, and contact your other elected officials to ask them to take a stand on this issue. I can think of nothing that is a more direct threat to the New River Valley's natural heritage than the sale of the national forest.

Please continue to let your friends and elected leaders know that our vision for good living in the New River Valley includes clean energy, healthy communities, and protected national forests.

David Bernard

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

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