



21ST CENTURY FOX

One Earth, One Chance

Sierra Club Valley of the Fox Group
Serving Kane and Kendall Counties

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Mountaintop Removal Destroys Appalachia

Excerpts from *The Dirty Truth About Coal*: A Sierra Club 2007 publication.

One of the most devastating types of coal mining is known as mountaintop removal mining, a technique common in Appalachia. Mining companies literally blow the tops off mountains to reach the seams of coal and then, to minimize waste disposal costs, dump millions of tons of waste rock into streams and valleys below, causing permanent damage to the ecosystem and landscape. This destructive practice has damaged or destroyed approximately 1200 miles of streams, disrupted drinking water supplies, flooded communities, eliminated forests, and destroyed wildlife habitat. Coal companies have created at least 6,800 landfills to hold their mining waste, and the government estimates if this mining continues unabated in Appalachia it will destroy 1.4 million acres of land by 2020—the date when the coal is expected to run out.

Beyond these environmental concerns, mountaintop removal mining poses other dangers to local communities as well. One stunning example is Sundial, West Virginia, where Marsh Fork Elementary School lies a mere 400 yards downhill from a massive coal waste impoundment containing 2.8 billion gallons of toxic sludge. The state acknowledges the facility would likely cause deaths if it fails, and estimates students and teachers would have only about three minutes to escape if a breach occurred. Alarmingly, almost a third of impoundments in the state built since 1972 have ruptured, spilling more than 170 million gallons of sludge. Even worse is the track record of the parent company, Massey Energy, which owns the impoundment; it is responsible for over half of the state's spills. Impoundment dam breaks have caused widespread devastation in West Central



Photo by Vivian Stockman/www.ohvec.org; flyover courtesy of SouthWings.

Appalachia before, like the Buffalo Creek disaster that killed 125 people and left thousands more homeless.

Central Appalachia is home to some of the poorest counties in the nation. Interestingly, while mining production rose in West Virginia 32 percent over a ten-year period, the number of mining jobs dropped by 29 percent because mountaintop removal mining relies on machinery and explosives rather than experienced miners. Mountaintop removal mining has also caused the value of some homes to drop 90 percent, and is responsible for cracking the foundations and walls of nearby houses. The mining also jeopardizes the much needed income brought into the region from tourism. Mountaintop removal mining is simply the most destructive and irresponsible mining technique used today.

Coal mining is frequently associated with water pollution, including acid mine drainage. One source of acid drainage is from "gobs", or piles of waste coal and other rocks that are cast aside during mining. Another more common source of mine drainage is abandoned mines that fill with water that becomes acidic and mixes with heavy metals and minerals. When this toxic water leaks out, it combines with groundwater and streams, causing water pollution and damaging soils. Acid mine drainage can harm plants, animals, and humans. For example, in Pennsylvania alone acid mine drainage has polluted more than 3,000 miles of streams and ground waters, which affects all four major river basins in the state. The toxic pollution has even led to places termed "no fish" or streams where fish cannot survive because the

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A Stream Monitoring Plan

Every one of our water sentinals does an awesome job of monitoring their streams. When the call comes through, our volunteers are ready and able to grab their water samples and get them to Ron Bedard who, by the way, takes time out of his Saturdays to analyze the samples brought to him.

With that said, why do we do what we do? It is because of our love of the river and its tributaries, or something else? Whatever the reason, we could all benefit by following some simple guide lines.

When you monitor a water way answer these questions:

- Why do I want to monitor the stream?
- Where will I collect information? Determine the best areas for sampling. Look for inlets and outlets.
- How will I collect the information? Use what ever is easy for you to collect waters samples. Plastic containers are Water

Sentinals best friends.

- What parameters will I monitor?

The Water Sentinals monitor to determine the health of the water through chemical analysis, but feel free to adopt your waterway and keep tabs on other aspects, such as assessing potential impacts. Check the numbers of invertebrates, (i.e. dragonfly nymphs, damselfly nymphs, riffle beetles, caddisfly larva) fish and other wildlife. Look at the vegetation; is it native or non-native? This might take some research on your part, but it is well worth the effort when you have an overall view of your stream's health.

It is up to you to determine how much you want to learn about your stream. I plan to take the extra step and follow these simple guidelines when monitoring my waterway.

Be prepared to read about my finding in upcoming newsletters. Please send your findings, too and they will be shared with our members.

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water is so polluted. Acid mine drainage has also been a problem for the past two decades in western Maryland, where officials have documented 342 leaks of toxic water and where a new discharge killed all of the fish in the Georges Creek in 2006.

So what can you do about all this? Think renewables, and energy efficiency, cleaner ways to produce

electricity and better ways to use less. Think before you flip that light switch or leave that computer on. demand clean air. We need to reduce global warming emissions, burning coal does not get us there. And Mountaintop Removal mining destroys a way of life, a culture that is as old as our country.

For more information: www.sierraclub.org/coal

Save Paper! Save Trees! Save VOF Money!

You can now receive the 21st Century Fox electronically. We all talk about saving trees, saving paper, being environmentally responsible. Going electronic is a way to do that.

To subscribe to the *21st Century Fox* (VOF's newsletter, as well as the Chapter *Lake & Prairie*), send your

name, membership number (eight digit # on the address label of your *Sierra* magazine) and your e-mail address to: editor@illinois.sierraclub.org. If you cannot locate your membership number, please contact fran.caffee@illinois.sierraclub.org.

Thank you for doing your part.

From the Chair

Well, sort of from the chair.

Until the end of 2007, Dudley Case and I have agreed to share the chair responsibilities. Dudley will conduct ExCom (business) meetings and I (Fran Caffee) will conduct the Public meetings. Real officers will be selected by the end of the year. Watch the website for details, sierraclub.org/chapters/ill/vof.

Even though most of us needed to take a hiatus this past summer, work continued. The Water Sentinals did their 3rd Quarterly monitoring on August 18 and made plans for the Annual Meeting to be held on September 17th.

Photos were collected and plans made for the Open House held on September 10. I hope you were there.

VOF member Nate Stelton was one of the judges for a photo contest held by the Prairie Parkway opponents, Citizens against the Sprawlway.

The Fundraising Committee has already selected a date for the 2008 Paddleboat ride of the Fox River. It will be on July 26. Mark your calendar now. Proceeds will go to support continued work of the VOF Group. April 19 is the River Clean-Up date. As always we need help with the Clean-up. Maybe this year you will offer to help with planning?

As you can see, VOF is always working, even when on hiatus.

Join us at a meeting soon and see what you are missing.

Fran Caffee

New Listservs

Get involved! Please check the VOF Web site (sierraclub.org/chapters/ill/vof) for announcements of new listservs.

Listservs are easy to subscribe to and just as easy to unsubscribe from if you find they generate too much e-mail.

Sign up to receive Sierra Club Insider, the flagship e-newsletter. Sent out twice a month, it features the Club's latest news and activities. Subscribe and view recent editions at <http://www.sierraclub.org/insider/>

The Mystery of the Big Bagged Bird

by Barbara Vrchota

Earth day 2007. It was a day like any other, sunny and warm with a hint of a breeze softly blowing across the river. Many Sierra Club volunteers appeared on the river's edge in Aurora to participate in a much needed spring cleaning. Some walked the path and picked up trash, while others waded and pulled debris from the watery depths. Some of the usual items were removed, and some not so usual items were removed. This is the tale of one of those unusual specimens discovered on clean-up day.

There it is was hanging out in the river, the most unusual object to date. It was a Thanksgiving bird, about 20 pounds, still in the plastic wrapping.

Where did it come from? How long had it been there? How did it miss the holidays? These questions and more were wracking my brain. I knew I would not sleep until I found the answer and solved the ... Mystery of the Big Bagged Bird.

In my extensive investigation, I found that not only one turkey was retrieved, but a second was found. Coincidence, you say. I think not. My head began to reel with thoughts of turkey, stuffing, and countless other holiday fare. I started counting them in my sleep. "One, two, one, two." Was it a turkey conspiracy or something much deeper, deeper than the Fox River itself? On those sleepless nights I came up with several clues which I will share with you.

1. An escaped plastic wrapped bird was found in the Fox River!
2. A second turkey turned up one month later!
3. They are both name brand turkeys!
4. This is the big one, a mind blower if you will. A friend of a friend, has a friend who received a similar name brand turkey from an establishment that docks on the Fox River in Aurora. It was a gift to the customers over the holiday season for depositing lots of money in their place of business. No can state for sure the bird came from the suspect place, but I have to believe, if a friend of a friend, of a friend said so, it's got to be true.

That said, let's ponder upon the ways the bagged bird went from point a, the establishment, to point b, the river. Have you heard of turkey bowling? It's where a frozen turkey is tossed much like a bowling ball into a group of pins. The same rules of bowling apply to this game. It is quite possible the turkeys made their way into the river after a game of turkey bowling went awry. Another assumption is the turkeys in question could have been simply forgotten in the parking facility of said establishment's parking lot, and found their way to the river. I tend to believe there is a more creative way they ended in the river. How about the turkey chuck, where you chuck the turkey like a shot put? The winner chucks it the farthest. I could go on and on, but I'll spare you.



The, umm, bird under suspicion...

One thing we know for sure is turkeys invaded our water ways, at least for a little while. There may be more out there just waiting to stir up our senses but, for now, if you have any information on this mystery, please let me know, so I can finally get some rest.

ATTENTION MEMBERS!!!

The Valley of the Fox Group would like to send short e-mail messages to our members occasionally. The quickest and most efficient way for us to do this would be by e-mail. If you are interested, and we hope you are, please send your e-mail address to: vf-newsed@illinois.sierraclub.org. Thank you!

Visit the Valley of the Fox Web Site! <http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/il/vof>
Sign Up for the Valley of the Fox ListServe!

To: IL-VOFNEWS@LISTS.SIERRACLUB.ORG Subject: [leave blank]
Message: SUBSCRIBE IL-VOFNEWS [your name]

A beautiful pair of bald eagles take a break among the pines.

We can all be thankful that Benjamin Franklin's suggestion for national bird was voted down, or the turkey would be our national bird....

Photo provided by Nate Stelton.



Don't Forget!

Valley of the Fox Group meets at the Batavia Public Library on the second Monday of every month from 7-9 p.m. except July, August and December.

VOF Calendar of Events

For more information about outings and hikes, see the Outings section of the *Lake & Prairie*.

All meetings are held at the Batavia Public Library at 7 p.m. the 2nd Monday of each month except July, August and December. The public is invited to attend.

Check the website for outings!

October 8 (Monday) -

General membership meeting. Tom Weisner, Mayor of Aurora, will be guest speaker. What is Aurora doing to be Clean and Green?

November 12 (Monday) -

General membership meeting. Speaker to be announced.

November 17 (Saturday) -

4th Quarterly Water Sentinels Monitoring Day. Contact fran.caf-fee@sierraclub.org.

December 8 (Saturday) -

Annual Christmas Party at Garfield Farm. Check the VOF website for details: [www.sierraclub.org.il/vof](http://www.sierraclub.org/il/vof)

April 19, 2008 Earth Day -

Mark your calendar now for VOF's Annual Fox River Clean-Sweep. Don't let others have all the fun.

Driving Green

The top five 2007 green cars according to www.greencars.org:

1. Toyota Prius (averages 60 m.p.g).
2. Honda Civic Hybrid (averages 49 m.p.g).
3. Nissan Altima Hybrid (averages 42 m.p.g).
4. Toyota Camry Hybrid (averages 40 m.p.g.).
5. Toyota Yaris (averages 34 m.p.g.).

The top five 2007 gas guzzlers are:

1. Lamborghini Murchilgo (averages a pitiful 9 m.p.g.).
2. Mayback 57s/62s (11 m.p.g.).
3. Bentley Azure (averages 11 m.p.g).
4. Bentley Arnage RC (10 m.p.g.).
5. Ford F-250 (averages 13 m.p.g).

The Dodge Ram 2500 Mega Cab and Lincoln Navigator also average 13 mpg.

2007 VOF 4Q Organizational Change

The Sierra Club Board of Directors authorized an organizational change process in June 2007; and the Organizational Change Steering Committee has been hard at work since.

Using the information gathered from a May 2007 on-line survey of 800 Club leaders, as well as discussion at the May Board retreat, interviews with staff and volunteers, including GovCom leaders and Board members, and discussions at a GovCom Assembly in early August, we have identified commonly reported difficulties posed by the current national decision-making structure. These difficulties often stymie the work of dedicated activists, forcing and detracting from their ability to do the Club's work. We have grouped these many difficulties into three key core problems:

1. The Structure - The complexities of GovCom structures, the lack of connection between volunteer and staff structures, and between national and local structures, the difficulty experienced by chapter leaders in accessing information at the national level.
2. Lack of Clarity - There is a lack of clarity around how national decisions are made, what paths various decisions should take and the scope and authority of different parties and entities. There is thus little accountability for making and adhering to decisions. There is a feeling that a decision is final only until someone disagrees with it.
3. Communication - We have both inadequate (not enough) and ineffective (not getting the message across) internal communications. That means that chapters don't know what national entities are doing and vice versa, and that staff and volunteers at the national level are not in sync.

We have developed a list of principles by which we will judge any new model structures and processes:

The new structure should result in..

1. Enhanced ability to fulfill the mission
2. Closer collaboration between and among staff and volunteers
3. Less overlapping authority and duplication of effort
4. Clear decision-making paths
5. More time and energy focused on doing the work instead of deliberation
6. More robust implementation structures
7. Greater ability to move strategically and make decisions quickly
8. Greater satisfaction in everyone's involvement with the Club
9. A governance structure that is more closely tied to the elected Board
10. A structure that seeks people with new ideas and welcomes involvement of new members
11. Better alignment between national and local entities.

And...Keep It Simple.

We think structures that meet each of these principles will strengthen the Club and enable it to be both more responsive to members and more effective in the world. We will meet again in person just before the September Board meeting, then offer a progress report to the Board and Council of Club Leaders. A final report and recommendations are due to the Board by year's end.

Project Renewal is a consultative process that relies on the committee's ability to research, deliberate, and dialogue with Club leaders such as yourself. How can we streamline structure and processes to make it easier for approved programs to proceed and dedicated activists to become involved?

The committee's work products are being posted on: <http://clubhouse.sierraclub.org/committees/ocsc/>. We welcome your reactions through our blog (<http://sierraclubprojectrenewal.blogspot.com/>) and communications to the committee.

Allison Chin, for the Organizational Change Steering Committee

2007 VOF VIPs

All VOF leaders listed below can be reached by e-mail by using the following example: firstname.lastname@illinois.sierraclub.org. The following Leaders have assumed ExCom status and officers will be selected before January 1, 2008: Ron Bedard, Fran Caffee, Julie Koivula, Jan Mangers, Terry Murray, Gene Schultz, Jon Wesenberg, Craig Zabel, and Barb Vrchota. Check the website for updates at www.sierraclub.org/il/vof.

21st Century Fox is published quarterly by the Valley of the Fox Group of the Sierra Club. Send all submissions to Barbara Vrchota at bvrchotacomcast.net. Deadline for the next issue is November 1, 2007.

The Valley of the Fox Group meets the second Monday of every month (except July, August, and December). All public meetings are held at the Batavia Library at the southeast corner of Route 31 and Wilson Avenue. Call 630-208-9567 or any VOFExCom member for directions.