

FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER



Fall Foliage next to Bog with Tawny Cottongrass

WORKING TO PROTECT WEST VIRGINIA'S HIGH ALLEGHENIES, BLACKWATER RIVER, & BLACKWATER CANYON.

PO Box 247 - Thomas, WV 26292 - phone: 304-345-7663 - www.saveblackwater.org - info@saveblackwater.org

Fall Time in the Allegheny Highlands

Everyone knows fall is for leaf peeping. This year we decided to go with a top down drone photograph as the fall newsletter cover. We chose this photo in particular because it contains multiple elements that are signature to the Allegheny Highlands region of West Virginia. For one, there are multiple Red Spruce and Eastern Hemlocks scattered throughout, two very common species of the Upland Hemlock-Hardwood Forest Type frequently encountered in the Highlands. Secondly, in the bottom right corner of the image is a wetland known as a High-Mountain Sphagnum Bog. These bogs are extremely common throughout the Blackwater River Watershed, and if you look closely, you will notice the countless white tufts of Tawny Cottongrass, a species that signifies fall time here in the Highlands. Lastly, and most obviously, is the colorful foliage of the Red and Sugar Maples. These species are the icing on the cake for fall time in the Highlands, painting the landscape with a splash of saturation that only sticks around for a few weeks before the harsh winter blankets it in white.

Good News for Imperiled Species!

Luckily, the Northern Long-eared Bat kept its endangered species status after President Biden vetoed its delisting. This bat inhabits West Virginia and is found within the Monongahela National Forest. They need protections due to their susceptibility to White-nosed Syndrome, a fungal pathogen initially introduced by humans that is currently decimating bat populations in the US.

The main threat to Eastern Hellbenders is stream sedimentation, which fills in the spaces under large stones they require for their survival.



Eastern Hellbender
Jeff Briggler/MDC



Northern Long-eared Bat
Al Hicks/NYDEC

PRESS RELEASE:
October 2, 2023



LOCAL VOLUNTEER GROUP WINS STATEWIDE WATERSHED PROMOTION AWARD.

Friends of Blackwater receives recognition for promoting the Blackwater River Watershed from the West Virginia Watershed Network.

Statewide, WV. (September 30, 2023) –Local volunteer organization Friends of Blackwater received the Promotion Award for their efforts to make everyone aware of beauty, fascinating natural assets, and history of the Blackwater River watershed. The West Virginia Watershed Network presented the award at the West Virginia Watershed Symposium held at Canaan Valley Resort State Park this year on September 29th -30th.

Friends of Blackwater (FOB) works to protect and promote natural beauty, diverse creatures, unique heritage, and the outdoor recreation economy in the Mid-Atlantic Allegheny Highlands - home to the magnificent, 10,000-acre Blackwater Canyon, which they label “West Virginia’s Scenic Crown Jewel.”

FOB has produced a cascade of events, volunteer days, and social media posts recently, which are all designed to increase pride, enjoyment, and interest in the Blackwater River watershed. The Network cited their series of nature walks with naturalists knowledgeable about birds, amphibians, moths, and plants.

The Network also cited the group’s volunteer workdays for removing invasive, non-native vegetation and planting native plants. Finally, the Network cited Friends of Blackwater’s promotion of the story of Carrie Williams, the teacher at the Coketon Colored School, who objected when the County wanted to reduce the school year at her school to five months when other schools had a nine month school year, and of J.R. Clifford, West Virginia’s first African American attorney, who brought the case to court and won.

FOB has also released posts on social media, including more than 50 Youtube videos covering natural history, industrial history, water monitoring, and waterfalls in the watershed. They have more than 160 posts on Instagram, many of them showing stunning views of Blackwater Falls, curious creatures, and majestic forests. They make residents and visitors proud to be connected with the watershed.

The WV Watershed Symposium (formerly Watershed Celebration Day) is hosted by the WV Watershed Network. The biennial event is held to provide resources for watershed groups’ work, raise consciousness about watershed groups, and recognize the efforts and accomplishments of watershed groups in West Virginia. It provides an opportunity for watershed volunteers to meet, learn from each other, and engage in statewide collaborative efforts. Awards presented at the event also included: Restoration for a group excelling at fixing issues in their watershed, Vigilance for a group working to ensure environmental water laws are followed, Education for a group that teaches its community about water, watersheds, and aquatic communities, as well as Watershed Hero to one person who goes above and beyond expectations for their own organization and for watershed organizations across the state..

ENDS

West Virginia Watershed Network

WVWN@wvivers.org

<https://wvivers.org/resources/watershed/wcd2020/>

Mission: The West Virginia Watershed Network (WVWN) comprises nonprofits as well as state and federal agencies who support the work of watershed groups to unify their communities and protect, restore, celebrate, and educate about their watersheds.



Frank Gebhard Accepting Award from Martin Christ, WVDEP

Testimony July 13, 2023 at National Forests Eastern Hearing

I will speak from a very local perspective, a perspective derived from my family and from multiple generations of residents within the boundaries of the local National Forest. Here in north central West Virginia we are blessed with the surrounding Monongahela National Forest which hosts documented old-growth stands and, since the "big cut" and associated fires, has regenerated thousands of acres of ecologically mature hardwood and mixed hardwood/conifer forest. The area is typified by steep forested slopes with small communities and farms in the wider valleys. The Forest provides us and downstream communities with excellent drinking water and with water for our farm livestock.

Unfortunately there are some drawbacks from being surrounded by the National Forest. The Forest's excessive focus on timber harvest, creation of openings, and young forest overlooks the many other benefits of our National Forests and ignores the risks that are created by timber harvest and associated road construction. Even worse, the timber harvest now conducted here is almost exclusively by clearcuts, creating fire hazard and fertile ground for invasive species spreading from "wildlife openings" and other artificial breaks in the continuity of the forest canopy. That outdated approach is typified by the Monongahela N.F.'s recent proposal to clearcut 3,500 acres of mature and old-growth forest in the "Upper Cheat River Project". In this region, which is a nationally recognized center of mature forest biodiversity, the Forest Service needs to focus on the many benefits that the Forest provides beyond lumber production.

Locally, timbering on this National Forest rarely takes into consideration our water supplies and the roads and clearcuts on the surrounding steep mountains contribute to the muddying of our waters and to flood risk. With the documented increased precipitation in this area, flooding of homes and farm fields has become a frequent occurrence and the Forest Service's clearcuts on steep slopes here only aggravate an already bad situation. The county has a history of catastrophic floods, several directly linked to previous logging. In addition the Forest has also become a primary source of exotic invasive plants that have invaded our fields. The USDA Forest Service needs to place a greater focus on maintaining the ecological integrity of National Forests, not turning ecologically mature forests into "young forests". A re-focusing of the Forests Service's goals, away from board feet, to ecological sustainability will alleviate many of the threats to local communities and to the rich biodiversity of the region.

John Coleman for Speak For Trees Too (Speak4Trees2@gmail.com)

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Along Route 219



Clearcut Steep Hillside



Clearcut with Logging Roads



Steep Clearcut



Plane Used During Flyover

We have some good news on Corridor H!

After extensive meetings between the state and the Federal Highways Administration the WVDOT has agreed to study an alternate route to the north of Thomas with an exit north of the town. The route will avoid the landfill and begin to go north near the Rubenstein Center where there will be another exit for Davis. The route will avoid Benbush and Pierce.

The goal now is to keep up the pressure to make sure their studies of the northern route are as extensive and as detailed as the ROPA, their preferred route. We are also concerned about protecting the public land on the Monongahela National Forest at the western end of this 10 mile segment. Particularly sensitive are the areas near Big Run Bog and on the steep slopes going down to the Mackeyville/Wolfe Run Area. This area also contains two native trout streams that could be majorly damaged by construction and also by core drilling here before construction.

Big Run Bog, October 2023

Core Drilling Raises Concerns

While study of a northern route is exciting news there is some bad news as well. The FHWA is allowing the state to perform core drilling. Performing core drilling now while they are still designing routes is outside of the legal planning process. So they are breaking the rules of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act). They also appear from these actions to still be favoring the route next to Blackwater Falls State Park and the Blackwater Industrial complex. Public comment on these core drilling permits is coming soon. Please join us in raising concerns.



Core Drilling Begins off Rt. 219 at High School



Go North Supporters Gather in Canaan Valley for Food, Fun, & Fundraising



Tom Rodd Auctioning at Go North Party

Great music greeted guests at the Dalton House Party at their beautiful home in Canaan Valley.

David & Cindy Proudfoot from Belington played old time fiddle and guitar while guests enjoyed donated food and drinks. A live auction raised additional funds for the Go North Campaign. Artworks, books, furniture and weekend getaways engaged the crowd. Thanks to major sponsors overall \$25,000 has been raised for expert engineering reports and legal fees. Thanks to all who organized the event and who support the Go North Alliance!

Join Us for Herpetology in the Highlands

Friends of Blackwater's staff are very enthusiastic about the amphibian diversity in the Allegheny Highlands. In fact, the Southern Appalachians are the global hotspot for salamander diversity! This means there are actually more species of salamander here than anywhere else on Planet Earth. The Blackwater River Watershed boasts a robust subset of this salamander diversity.

Amphibians are an indicator of a healthy ecosystem due to the niches they occupy. Many species exhibit an aquatic phase as juveniles and later develop lungs and take to the land (at least partially) as adults, meaning the water and surrounding land both must be clean for them to survive. They also breathe and drink through their skin, requiring a clean environment to avoid directly absorbing pollution into their bodies.

Amphibians are very important to have around for a number of reasons. Mainly, they keep insect populations in check, removing a staggering number of pests from the ecosystem every year. A benefit that many are unaware of is that salamanders prey on many invertebrates that eat fallen leaves and other decaying plant matter. When these invertebrates eat this plant matter, they release CO₂ into the atmosphere. By eating these small invertebrates, salamanders are preventing that CO₂ from being released and allow this plant matter to be buried in the soil with its stored carbon. In some areas, the biomass of Eastern Red-backed Salamanders is greater than the mammals, meaning if you were to collect all of the Red-backed Salamanders and mammals and weigh them, the salamanders would weigh more! That's a lot of salamanders, and a lot

of carbon kept out of the atmosphere as a result.

FOB's staff like to take part in an activity known as "herping". Herpetology is the study of reptiles and amphibians; herping is when you go out and search for them. Our Project Coordinator, Frank, travels all over the Eastern US in search of new species of salamanders to see each year. If he ends up in an area with high salamander diversity, you better believe he will flip every log in sight (before promptly returning them to their previous position to avoid habitat destruction) in search of these colorful gems hiding below. He will tell anybody that the main reason he wanted to live in the Appalachian Mountains was simply the salamander diversity.

Frank recently attended the West Virginia Herpetological Society's

Wehrle's Salamander
(*Plethodon wehrlei*)



Northern Slimy Salamander
(*Plethodon glutinosus*)



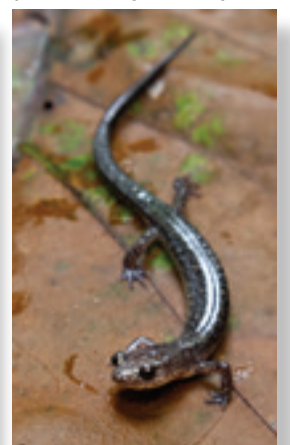
Long-tailed Salamander
(*Eurycea longicauda*)



Northern Spring Salamander
(*Gyrinophilus porphyriticus*)



Blacksburg Salamander
(*Plethodon jacksoni*)



Northern Two-lined Salamander (*Eurycea bislineata*)



Seal Salamander (*Desmognathus monticola*)



Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander
(*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*)



annual symposium. The group took part in a bit of herping, listened to some talks about scientific research in herpetology, and shared many great stories. It was located at New River Gorge National Park, a good spot for salamanders.

Something that makes herping so fun is the amount of new species that are being described year after year. In recent years, West Virginia has seen the addition of a few species. One to note is the Yellow-spotted Woodland Salamander (*Plethodon pauleyi*) that was named in honor of Dr. Thomas Pauley, a herpetologist from Marshall University who is well respected for his research on salamanders. It only occurs south of the New River, occupying crevices within shale outcrops. Before 2019 (when it was described) it was considered to be a color variant of the Wehrle's Salamander, *Plethodon wehrlei*.

We still have what is considered the Wehrle's salamander in the Blackwater River Watershed.

There is one salamander in the Watershed that occupies crevices in sandstone outcrops as opposed to shale, the Green Salamander, *Aneides aeneus*. Frank and our Naturalist, Aaron noticed upon looking at range maps for this species in WV, Tucker County was missing. They were determined to seek them out in the Watershed because the habitat looked too perfect to not have them here. Last summer they spotted one wedged into a sandstone outcrop and achieved their goal. This year, they have been able to uncover two additional sites where they occur, further confirming they have a stronghold within the Watershed. A testament to how much remains to learn about these elusive creatures.

Please enjoy this selection of photos from Frank exhibiting many species from within the Blackwater River Watershed and a few from Virginia (Blacksburg & Big Levels Salamanders) and North Carolina (Hickory Nut Gorge Green & Yonahlossee Salamanders)

Join Friends of Blackwater on a herping trip as part of our eco tour program! (Read more about the FOB eco tour program on page 8)



Big Levels Salamander (*Plethodon sherando*)



Green Salamander (*Aneides aeneus*)



Hickory Nut Gorge Green Salamander (*Aneides caryaensis*)



Yellow-spotted Woodland Salamander (*Plethodon pauleyi*)



Yonahlossee Salamander (*Plethodon yonahlossee*)



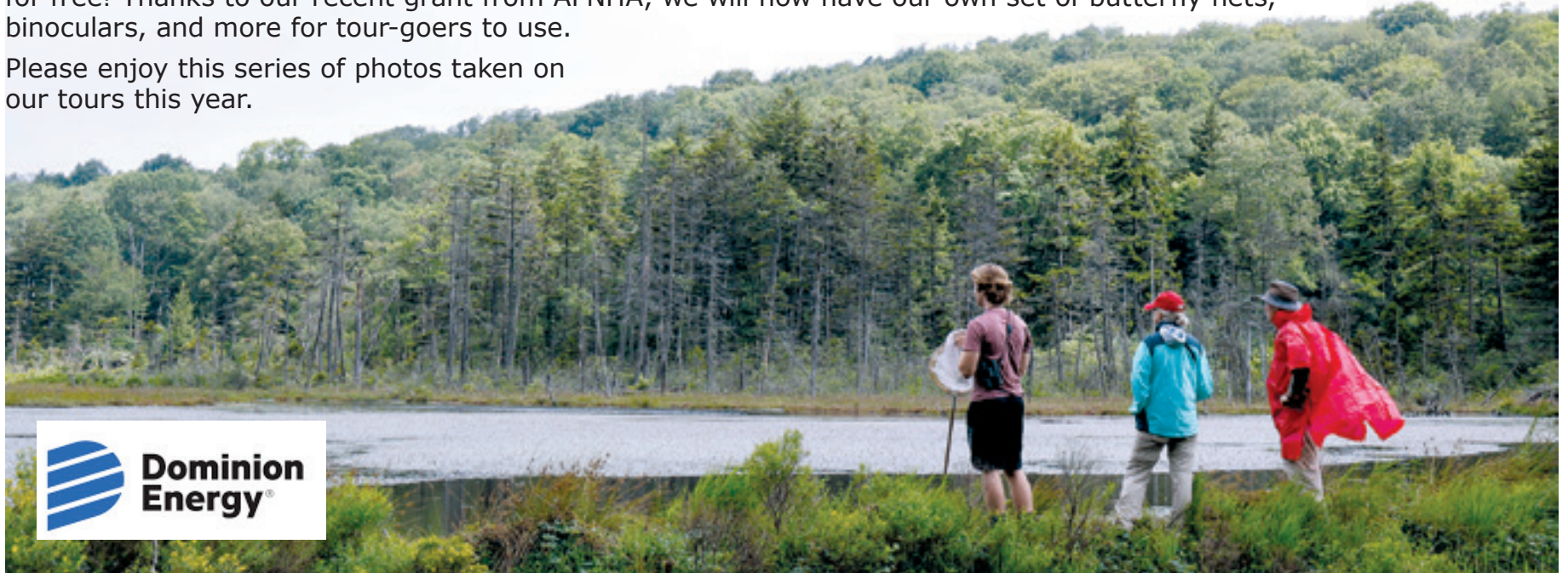
Looking back on this Season's Eco Tours

FOB had a successful year of eco tours. We were astounded to have over 20 people join us on one of our trips (far exceeding the number of attendees from last year)! Our main eco tour leader, Aaron, as well as Frank and Atlee, enjoyed being able to show the unique beauty of the Blackwater River Watershed to everyone who came out for our tours.

We took people all over the Watershed this summer; leading trips to Dolly Sods Wilderness Area, Canaan Valley, Big Run Bog, and everywhere in between. Aaron ran a morning flight bird count along the Allegheny Front at Dolly Sods and got over 1,200 birds! Frank led a trip one night up at Canaan Loop Road where the group got to observe eight species of salamanders!

We want to thank Dominion Energy for helping fund our tours this year and Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area for funding our tours next summer! Without them we would not be able to offer these incredible opportunities to you for free! Thanks to our recent grant from AFNHA, we will now have our own set of butterfly nets, binoculars, and more for tour-goers to use.

Please enjoy this series of photos taken on our tours this year.



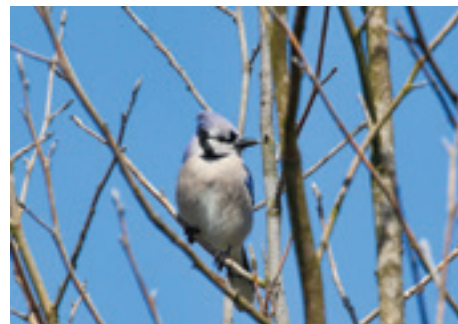
Aaron & Attendees at Big Run Bog



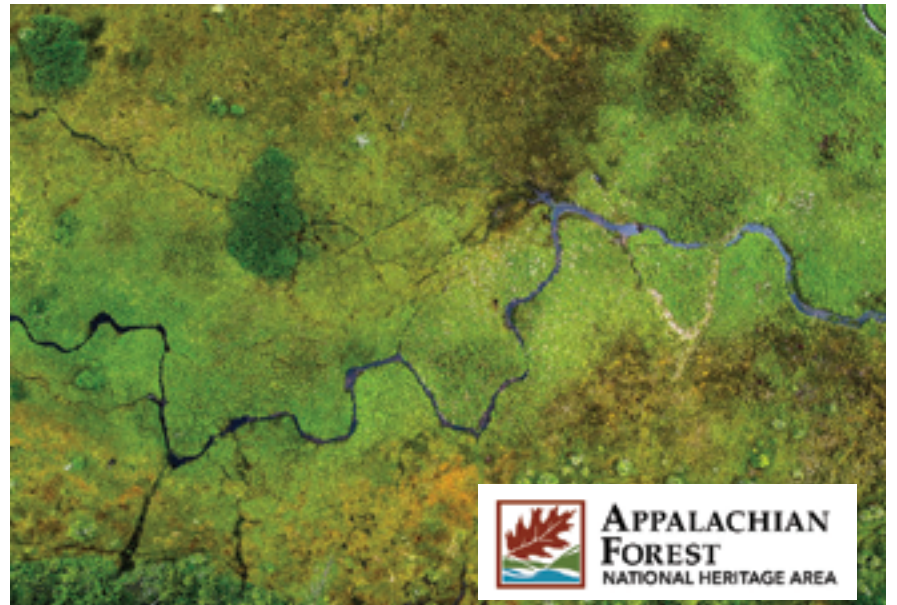
Aaron showing Butterfly to Tour Group



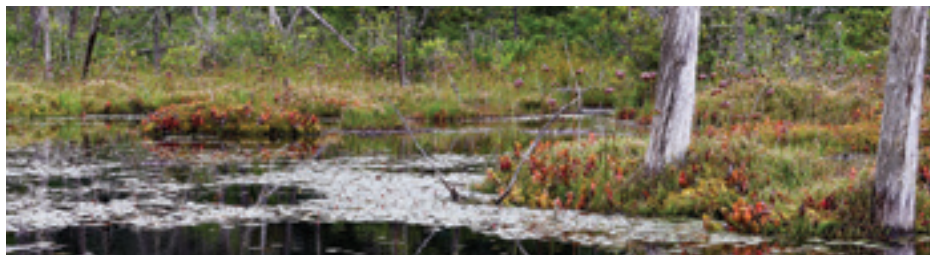
Aaron with Tour Group



Blue Jay



Drone Shot of Big Run Bog



Purple Pitcher Plants in Big Run Bog



Small Green Wood Orchid



Pileated Woodpecker



New Graphic Novel and Outreach Programs "Tell All" About Blackwater Heroes J.R. Clifford and Carrie Williams.

In 1892, Carrie Williams, African-American Teacher at the one-room Coketon Colored School at the head of the Blackwater Canyon, decided to teach her students for free. Then Williams sued the School Board for back pay and won!

Williams could hardly have imagined that her courage and idealism would be celebrated and recognized more than 100 years later. Yet this is exactly the case. A giant mural of Carrie and her pupils overlooks the Blackwater River and the site of Williams' school. And thanks to Southern Partners and the Appalachian Community Fund, Friends of Blackwater has just published a new "graphic novel" version of Williams' story, and that of her lawyer John Robert "J.R." Clifford.

FOB has been distributing the new book at events around West Virginia. Tom Rodd gave an illustrated talk to 200 elementary school students during Black History Month in Jefferson County. He distributed copies at the Charles Town Black

Heritage Festival, and to members of the West Virginia Association of Museums.

The full story of the Williams case is explained at the website of FOB's J.R. Clifford Project, jrclifford.org.

Free copies of FOB's all-ages Clifford publications are available. Thanks to the FOB donors who make this possible!



Tom & Priscilla Rodd and Vicki Bubb Entertain Jefferson Co. Elementary Children

Public Meetings on Long Distance Trail



This past summer Friends of Blackwater and the Aurora Research Associates held a series of public meetings in towns along the Western Maryland railroad grade all the way to Cumberland. Meetings were set up in Parsons, Thomas, Piedmont, Keyser, Carpendale and Cumberland. Courtney Zimmerman of ARA ran the meetings with a power-point, posters, and brochures that described the historic resources along the railroad grade.

We had great audiences in all the towns that shared their knowledge of railroad history, their interest in a bike trail on this route, and their concern for historic buildings and other railroad related structures in their towns.

The West Virginia Humanities Council sponsored the research and the public meetings where we explained the results of the research. This work coincides with our plan for developing a long-distance trail from Parsons to Cumberland which would link to the Allegheny Highlands Trail in Hendricks

taking hikers and bikers on to Elkins on the old railroad grade. Find more on our website at saveblackwater.org/long-distance-trail



Carpendale Meeting with Courtney Zimmerman, Judy Rodd, Larry Brock, and Leanne King

“Moonshine Memories” is a Big Hit!

Friends of Blackwater has been researching and celebrating the rich, colorful history and heritage of the Allegheny Highlands for more than 20 years. Our recent history project, “Moonshine Memories,” tells the dramatic story of a Tucker County “moonshiner,” Albert “Ab” Crossland (1884-1973).

In 1969, the State of West Virginia sued to evict Crossland from his cabin on the grounds of the new Canaan Valley State Park. But Ab’s neighbors joined with aggressive lawyers and forced the State to back off!

Telling this story was first suggested to us by Canaan Valley resident Elaine George, who was essential to the project’s success. We organized three programs: two at Canaan Valley State Park in May and July, and one at the Parsons Courthouse in July, which were all supported by the West Virginia Humanities Council and the Tucker Community Foundation. More than 400 people attended.

At the programs, people who knew Ab and who were in the 1970 trial told their stories, and a community cast recreated the court proceedings. Distinguished WVU Professors Hal Gorby and Bob Bastress showed how Ab’s case reflected the big changes that were happening throughout Appalachia at the time. You can read more about the “Moonshine Memories” Project on our website. Thanks to everyone who participated, and to the FOB donors who made this possible! It was fun!



Moonshine Memories Cast



Moonshine Memories Cast



Peter Barmer with Signs Depicting His Family



Tekavec Sisters



Mary Quattro Pointing at Herself as a Child



Judy Rodd with BFSP Crew

Tour of Historic Davis signs along William Avenue

William Avenue in Davis is the latest setting for Friends of Blackwater’s interpretive signs. The thirteen signs along Davis’s main street highlight historic buildings and sites first built in the 1880’s, when Henry Gassaway Davis’s train arrived in the town. There is a sign for a freight office and grocery store, The Blackwater Hotel, a bar, boardinghouse and clothier as well as a restaurant, an auto repair and sales dealership, the Eagles Club, the train depot and the Babcock Boom and Lumber Office Building with merchandise at the street level. The town hall is featured which used to house the fire department. Next to it was the Davis “colored school” called the Sumner School and beside it an interpretive sign on the black community of Davis.

FOB held a historic sign tour on October 8th. We were joined by family members whose parents and grandparents are featured on the signs. They added a personal touch to the tour. Peter Barmer had two grandparents and his parents on the Miners and a Minster sign and he himself was featured on the “colored school” sign next to it. Jeanette Ware and three of her sisters joined the tour and told us about the Tekavec family from Yugoslavia whose photos are on the sign at Siriannis. Down the street is the sign for the Davis Lunch Room which was run by Grandma Quattro from Italy whose granddaughters, Mary Quattro and Karen DiPaolo attended and told us the story of the restaurant. Please plan to view the new signs in person or see them on our website at saveblackwater.org/davis-business-signs.

In Memory of Peggy Frankenfield



Peggy Cox Frankenfield, 95, a long-time resident of Roslyn, PA, passed away peacefully on June 28, 2023, at Artman Lutheran Home, in Ambler, PA. She lived most recently at Gloria Dei Farms in Hatboro, surrounded by friends. Peggy was born in Logan, West Virginia, in the beautiful Appalachian Mountains, and raised in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, spending summers with her extended family near Blackwater Falls, West Virginia. A great storyteller, Peg shared many amusing anecdotes about her travel adventures and her ambitious and sometimes calamitous projects with kindergarteners. Peg was passionate about the natural beauty of Blackwater Falls and ensuring its preservation.

She wrote to us in 2016 with the reason for her devotion:

“Dear Judy, Thank you for your note about my 15 years of support. I’m sure you must wonder why an old lady who lives in Philadelphia is such a loyal fan. I thought you might like to know that my grandfather -Jacob Alderton – was an early settler in Davis. He came there in the late 1800’s with Babcock Lumber Co and stayed on when they moved on. I spent my summers there in the house on Henry Ave. until I was 16.

After he died my mother and her sisters kept the house as a summer place and it was fun all summer with visiting aunts, uncles and cousins. Those are treasured memories for me. Several times in the summer we would visit the falls and take a picnic. I remember the first ranger – I think his name was Belmont Cleaver? When the war came, the house was sold but until a few years ago my cousins met every summer at Blackwater Lodge for a short reunion. Now we have steps to view the falls and marked trails – quite different from the way it was in the 30’s and 40’s but still dear to my heart.

Good luck with your fundraising and protection of a unique resource. Peggy Frankenfield.”



Rodds walking in honor of Peggy in Run For It

Stop by the Visitors Center in Davis to pick up a free Self- Guided Tour of the Signage



More Photos from the William Avenue Sign Celebration

Fall 2023



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2024 Calendar Sale

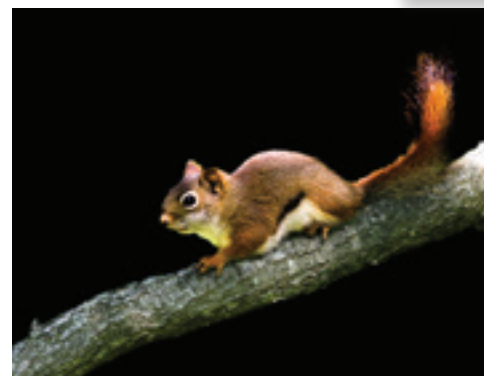
We just got our 2024 calendars in! The dates cover 1/1/24 to 12/31/24. Each month has its own photograph taken from within the Blackwater River Watershed during that month. All the photos in the calendar were taken by our staff (Aaron Graham, Atlee Wise, & Frank Gebhard). We have them in stock along with t-shirts, tote bags, books, etc. on our online shop. Scan the QR code or head over to saveblackwater.org/shop to order your calendar and other holiday gifts today!



Schreber's Watershield - June



Bear Rocks - August



Red Squirrel - November



FOB Shop