

The High Knob Herald

Official Newsletter of The Clinch Coalition

No. 14 Fall 2020

TCC Continues to Address Irresponsible Trail Development on the Spearhead Trails System

Throughout 2020, The Clinch Coalition has continued to work with stakeholders and community members across Southwest Virginia to address environmental issues on the state-funded Spearhead Trails system. In late 2019, numerous ATV trails that had been built into miles of Southwest Virginia waterways on the Spearhead system were shut down following complaints by TCC and subsequent inspections by host landowners. Since then, community members have informed TCC of new excavation by Spearhead Trails at a property upstream of Fort Blackmore and on High Knob that appeared to be occurring without adherence to state regulations. TCC has recently learned that state inspectors uncovered Spearhead Trails acting without appropriate erosion and sediment control plans at this site and have required that effort to obtain permitting before proceeding. TCC has also learned that inspectors have uncovered numerous locations on the Spearhead Trails system in Tazewell County where existing trails and recent construction are likely impacting public waterways. State officials are reportedly working to address and correct those issues.

We are disappointed that environmental laws continue to be disregarded by the Spearhead Trails effort, especially given that effort's use of taxpayer funding and guidance issued in 2019 by state regulators that instructed trail officials to begin obeying several water quality regulations. However, we are appreciative of state officials' continuing efforts to perform inspections over hundreds of miles of trails across numerous Southwest Virginia counties and requiring corrective action to address natural resource damage.

We are similarly thankful to the many local residents who have contacted us this year with specific concerns about activities in the Spearhead Trails effort. TCC will continue to engage with regulatory agencies and other stakeholders on this issue. We encourage anyone with concerns and information about environmental damage, finances or other activities related to Spearhead Trails to contact The Clinch Coalition so that the appropriate officials can be notified and investigate.



ATV damage to a wetland area along Spearhead Trails' Original Pocahontas System.



An unprotected stream crossing on a Spearhead Trail's Original Pocahontas System.



TCC Supports Diversity

The Clinch Coalition is committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable community.

Undergirding this commitment is the conviction that all human beings are interconnected, not just with one another, but with all of nature.

We will fulfill this commitment by recognizing and addressing racial inequality, systemic injustices, discrimination in any form, and being a social movement for environmental justice to encourage and allow all people to enjoy our public lands.

Unanimously passed by the TCC Board, October 3, 2020

TCC has worked for environmental justice for over 20 years. This year it seemed crucial to put our beliefs about equity and inclusion into a formal statement for our organization. We realize that as a nation and as a group we are not where we need to be. In the future we will be looking for ways to do more work in this area to increase a shared liberation for all.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

— Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from the Birmingham Jail

THANK YOU TO ALL THAT HELPED CREATE THE 2020 NEWSLETTER!

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7th ANNUAL HIGH KNOB HELLBENDER 10K

TCC hosted its 7th annual High Knob Hellbender 10K on Saturday, October 3rd. In spite of the pandemic, the Hellbender saw record participation with 89 runners tackling the six-mile climb from downtown Norton to the High Knob Tower. Event volunteers and runners alike took great care in adhering to public health guidelines to ensure a safe race, with no COVID-19 related issues resulting from the event.

A complete list of participants and race photos can be found at the event website at <http://highknobhellbender.wordpress.com>.

Congratulations to this Year's Winners

Overall Male
Matthew Leonard

Overall Female
Gretchen Addison

Masters Male
Shawn Becker

Masters Female
Lisa Hazlett

Grandmasters Male
Alan Sanders

Grandmasters Female
Patricia Carter



TCC is grateful to the many local volunteers and sponsors, particularly local businesses that have helped to make the Hellbender a signature event for the region and such a long-term success. The City of Norton and the Jefferson National Forest have also played a key role in allowing for this event to occur and be so successful over the past seven years. The 8th annual High Knob Hellbender 10K is scheduled for Saturday, October 2nd, 2021, and we look forward to again hosting runners from Southwest Virginia and beyond for the annual climb up High Knob.



*Thank you
to our
sponsors*

*Hagy & Fawbush
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Rarified Club – Big Cherry Dam Reaches Triple Digits

The past twelve months have experienced excessive wetness, even for what is typically Virginia's wettest landscape, with 102.30 inches (8.5 feet) of precipitation observed at Big Cherry Lake Dam in the High Knob Massif (as of October 2020).

This places Big Cherry Basin and the High Knob high country into a select group of locations which have reached triple digit precipitation amounts during any consecutive 12-month period in eastern North America. While a few isolated spots near the coast have achieved this benchmark, the greatest concentration of sites reaching over 100 inches club is found in southwestern North Carolina, where air from the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean is initially lifted upward into the southern Appalachians, and otherwise includes only a few select peaks from the Great Smokies backbone to Mount Mitchell and Mount Washington. In Virginia, the only other places to have potentially reached triple digit precipitation are at upper elevations of the Mount Rogers-Whitetop mass.

Consistency of wetness is what makes the High Knob Massif area the wettest in Virginia, with more than 75.00 inches observed, in the mean, over 12-water years since 2008-09. Perhaps of most significance, this does not include additional moisture contributed from fog drip and rime deposition and drop from trees that add greatly to this already wet, annual moisture budget.



Wayne's World

Long time TCC member Wayne Browning keeps track of weather data on the High Knob Massif. Wayne provided us with these interesting meteorological facts for 2018-2020.

*Total Precipitation

Autumn 2018-Summer 2019: **91.2"**

Autumn 2019-Summer 2020: **94.44"**

November 2019-October 2020: **102.34"**

*Automated IFLOWS rain gauge totals for the 24.4 meter (80.0 feet) tall dam structure are adjusted based upon direct 86-month comparisons during 2008-2015 between IFLOWS and National Weather Service rain gauges, and include occasional winter-time snow core data taken from accumulated snow on the ground.



The Clinch Coalition Challenges Trump Rollbacks

The Clinch Coalition joined with 16 other southern environmental organizations in the Southern Environmental Law Center's (SELC) challenge to President Trump's rollback proposal of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) enacted in 1970. TCC members David Skinner and Wally Smith presented testimony in the lawsuit.

Smith, TCC Vice President, stated "NEPA has long been a fundamental avenue for citizens seeking to have their voices heard in how our nation's public lands are managed. This rollback will severely limit the public's ability to participate in projects that are critical to some of the nation's most vulnerable communities at a time when those communities need to have their voices heard the most."

If approved, this rollback proposal will significantly narrow the scope of the law that requires federal agencies to consider the impact the timber industry has on the environment. These regulations protect water, air, land, and the public's health from development and/or for-profit resource extraction activities on public lands. Many companies that operate on National Forests and other public lands donate heavily to political candidates who do not believe environmental protection is important.

According to Skinner, TCC board member and retired Forest Service employee, "I came to understand how important NEPA is to making sure the public has a role in how public lands are managed. I am gravely concerned that the new NEPA regulations will prevent me and others from participating in the decision-making process to make sure our public lands are managed in a way that is in the best interest of the local citizens."

Wally Smith agrees, "Whether it's informing proposed actions on our national forests or addressing waterways damaged by irresponsible tourism development, NEPA has been an invaluable tool for Appalachian communities and their transition away from a declining coal economy."

SELC filed the lawsuit on July 28, 2020 just two weeks after President Trump announced less restrictive NEPA regulations. In doing so, the Trump administration sidestepped the longstanding legal process that guides any changes to the law.

According to SELC attorney Kym Hunter, "The Council on Environmental Quality, the agency in charge of the rewrite, simply jettisoned the rules to give industry executives what they want at the expense of the public ... and we won't let this administration get away with it."

At this point a motion by the government to dismiss the suit has been denied by the court, and litigation continues.

NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. The range of actions covered by NEPA is broad and includes: making decisions on permit applications, adopting federal land management actions, constructing highways and other publicly-owned facilities. The law also guides timber harvesting activities on National Forest land.



In addition to participating in legal actions, The Clinch Coalition monitors and challenges activities in the Clinch Ranger District as well as other districts in the National Forest that negatively impact the integrity of the forests. TCC continues to work closely with regional and national environmental groups including the Forest Carbon Coalition, Heartwood, Virginia Wilderness Committee, Center for Biological Diversity, Dogwood Alliance, Wild Virginia, Endangered Species Coalition, the Virginia Conservation Network and others.

"There is hope – I've seen it – but it does not come from the governments or corporations, it comes from the people."

-Greta Thunberg, Climate Change Activist



Our country has faced such a difficult and uncertain year with the pandemic that is upon us. For 13 years TCC has proudly met with our friends and community on High Knob for a wonderful day of presentations, hikes and just plain fun, but this year we were met with the decision of whether or not to cancel. If you look around the edges of this page, you see what our Rally committee decided. These images are from videos that were provided by our presenters that typically meet us on High Knob! These spectacular people stepped up to the challenge when the request was sent out for videos for a virtual rally. These videos remain for viewing on TCC website.

14th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally Goes Virtual!

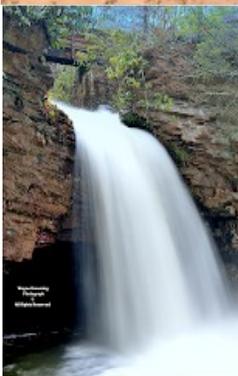


2020 Virtual Presenters

Find the videos at www.clinchcoalition.net. Enjoy!

High Knob Landforms—Wayne Browning
 Reptiles and Amphibians on HK—Wally Smith
 Solar Energy—Austin Counts
 Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms—Adam Boring
 High Knob Naturalist Rally Photos—Bill Harris
 Mussels of the Clinch River—Megan Bradley
 Virginia Tree Project—April Addington
 Structure and Topography of HK—Phil Shelton
 Biodiversity of SW Virginia—Diana Withen

Medicinal Plants—Adam Boring
 Wildflowers—Debbi Hale
 Pearly and Friends—Carol Doss
 Edible Plants—Phil Meeks
 Poison Ivy—April Addington
 Raptors—Mitch Whitaker
 Birding By Ear—Rachel Blevins
 Wolves—Rhonda Goins
 Nature Journaling—Emily Hines



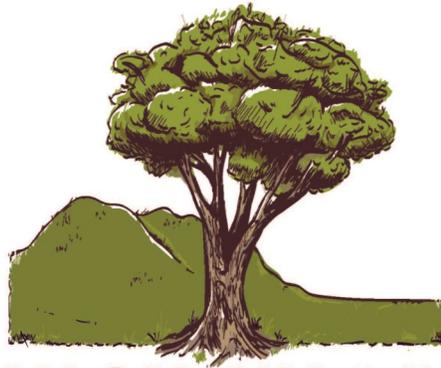
BAYS MOUNTAIN
 PARK & PLANETARIUM
 KINGSPORT, TENNESSEE



The Clinch Coalition greatly appreciates this year's Rally sponsors.

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 R-Mac Realty
 Scott County Virginia Star
 Scott County Tourism Committee
 Sturgill Funeral Home
 Valley View Animal Clinic*

THE CLINCH COALITION



HIGH KNOB NATURALIST RALLY



Name that Wildflower! Contest Winners Johnny Tompkins and Laura Neimeier



Grand Prize Drawing Winner Pete Mazuelos



High Knob: Ridge and Valley or Appalachian Plateau?

By Phil Shelton, Professor Emeritus UVA at Wise

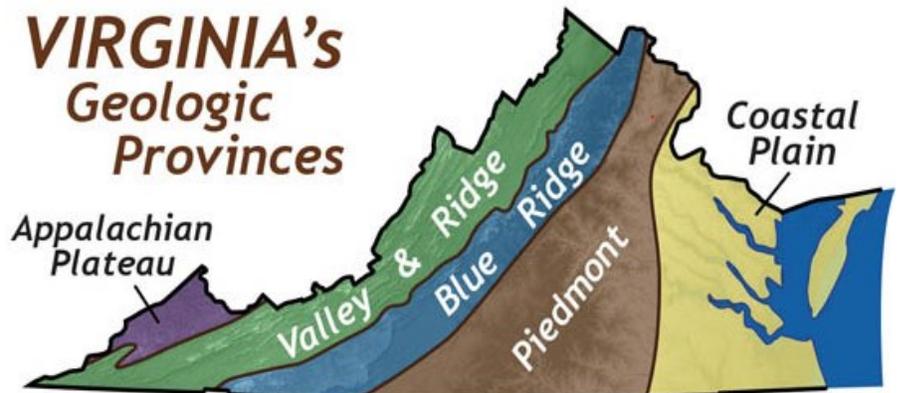
Virginia spans five physiographic provinces: the Coastal Plain, Piedmont, Blue Ridge, Ridge and Valley (or Valley and Ridge), and Appalachian (Allegheny or Cumberland) Plateau. The latter three of these are visible from High Knob. On a good day, looking southeast to southwest, one can see Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia, Mount Mitchell, in North Carolina, the highest point east of the Black Hills, Roan Mountain and several peaks in the Great Smoky Mountains along the North Carolina-Tennessee line, all part of the Blue Ridge province. In the foreground and extending from east to southwest, we see the long parallel ridges, especially Clinch Mountain and Copper Ridge, with intervening valleys, that make up the Ridge and Valley Province. West and northwestward we see evidence of coal surface mines. Due north across Pine Mountain we get glimpses of the Plateau in Kentucky and northeast possibly a little of the Plateau in West Virginia. What to call High Knob, and the coal fields between High Knob and Pine Mountain, is complicated by having features of both Ridge and Valley and Plateau.

The Ridge and Valley province is composed of folded and faulted early to middle Paleozoic (550 to 350 million-year-old) sedimentary rocks pushed northwest by the collision of North America with Europe and Africa in the last major mountain building episode about 250 million years ago. Subsequent erosion has left long, mostly parallel ridges, held up by resistant sandstones with intervening valleys of less resistant rocks, especially limestones and shales. Steams follow exposures of less resistant rocks, forming a trellis-like pattern.

The Plateau is essentially flat-lying later Paleozoic (250 – 300 million-year-old) sedimentary rocks, mostly

sandstones and siltstones, with interlayered coal seams, which have not been folded or faulted, but were uplifted vertically and deeply eroded into a dendritic (tree-like) pattern by streams flowing in multiple directions.

On a geology field trip in the early 1970's, Dr. Ralph L. Miller, then Chief of the Fuels Branch of the U.S. Geological Survey, who had worked many years in the Virginia coalfields, described what we saw from High Knob northwest and north as Plateau. I asked if it would not be more appropriate to call it Ridge and Valley, since we were standing on the major fold of the Cumberland Overthrust Block which had been moved several miles north-



west on the Pine Mountain Fault. Dr. Miller patiently explained that my reasoning was logical, but since most of the overthrust block was nearly flat-lying coal-bearing late Paleozoic sediments, contemporary in age with the plateau in Kentucky and West Virginia, he preferred to call it Plateau. Geologic and physiographic maps show Buchanan and Dickenson Counties, most of Wise County and a sliver of Lee County as Plateau, following Dr. Miller's reasoning. At least one map specifically mentions High Knob as a high point on the Plateau.

The Cumberland Overthrust Block is a rectangular area, roughly 200 km (125 miles) by 35 km (20 miles) underlain by the Pine Mountain thrust fault, a low angle fault along which the upper layers of sedimentary rocks were moved several miles northwest. The overthrust block is bounded on the northwest by Pine Mountain, a long, narrow ridge, the upturned leading edge of the overthrust block, running northeast by southwest on the Kentucky/Virginia state line in Dickenson and Wise Counties and continuing as a prominent ridge in Kentucky to Pineville and on into Tennessee, near Jacksboro, north of Knoxville. Resistant sandstones and conglomerates, older than the overlying coal measures, maintain the ridge crest.



Continued from page 8

The northeast boundary of the overthrust block is the Russell Fork fault, which runs northwest by southeast from Breaks Interstate Park to Big A Mountain, above Honaker, roughly parallel with the Dickenson/Buchanan County boundary. The southwest boundary is the Jacksboro Fault which, like the Russell Fork Fault, runs northwest by southeast for about 35 km (20 miles). The southeast edge of the overthrust block is a series of northeast by southwest folds and thrust faults that make up the typical Ridge and Valley Province.

Most of the 7000 square kilometer (2500 square mile) overthrust block looks like Plateau, with nearly flat-lying late Paleozoic sediments with coal seams. but in contrast with the Plateau in Kentucky, West Virginia and in Buchanan County, Virginia which has only been uplifted vertically, it is underlain by the Pine Mountain thrust fault, along which has been moved horizontally several

miles, and has two folds.

The Powell Valley Anticline, a large upward fold, is part of the overthrust block. It is widest and originally highest at the southwest edge of the overthrust block, narrowing and flattening northeastward and has lost any overlying coal measures that may have originally covered it. Structurally an upward fold often give rise to topographic valleys, and that is the case here. Erosion along the axis, probably facilitated by fracturing of the rocks as they were bent upward, exposes older, softer shales and limestones forming a rich agricultural valley bounded by prominent ridges of more resistant sandstone and conglomerate. High Knob stands at the head of the valley, where the anticlinal fold begins to flatten and become nearly imperceptible farther northeast, where route 72 crosses it between Coeburn and Dungannon. So High Knob and its surrounds are something of a geological hybrid, another reason it is special.

The Grand Canyon of the South in Our Own Back Yard

Located in the Jefferson Forest, the Breaks Interstate Park sits in both Southwest Virginia and Southeast Kentucky. The Breaks is known as the Grand Canyon of the South because it is the deepest gorge east of the Mississippi River, cut by the Russel Fork River.

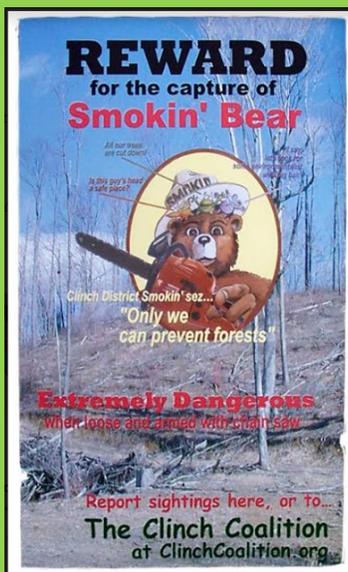
This is a place for people who love the great outdoors. From the several overlooks, there is breath-taking, spectacular scenery. You can watch nature dress up in the spring with all the blooming and leafing of the trees and dress down in the autumn as the brilliant leaves fall to the ground. Someone even found the elusive worm snake there sunning a bit.

There are 25 miles of scenic walking trails, and the park offers some of the wildest and most difficult white-water rafting and a zip line. A water park and paddle boats are also recreational features. Amenities include lodging, a restaurant, and a campground.

Due to the Covid-19 virus, some restrictions have been made and some accommodations are seasonal. To get the most up-to-date information, go to breakspark.com, on Facebook at [breaksinterstatepark](https://www.facebook.com/breaksinterstatepark), or call 276-865-4413 to find the recreational and adventure activities, special events. and interpretive programs awaiting you at the Breaks.

Let Our Forests Stand

Twenty years ago, The Clinch Coalition posted its first billboard in Wise County offering a reward for the capture of "Smokin' Bear." The message warned of rampant deforestation in the region and savage clear cutting of the great forests in Southwest Virginia. As a result of this campaign, TCC was able to reduce the Bark Camp timber sale from 1,400 acres to 620 acres.



TCC, president Sharon Fisher clarifies, "We support the termination of commercial logging on National Forest and other public lands. In the meantime we will promote the use of truly sustainable forest practices, primarily uneven aged management and the limiting of excessive timber harvesting."

The fight continues to protect our nation's woodlands. The Trump administration has opened up more than half of Alaska's Tongass National Forest to logging and other forms of development, stripping protections that had safeguarded one of the world's largest intact temperate rainforests for nearly two decades. The new rule states that it will make "an additional 188,000 forested acres available for timber harvest," mainly old growth timber.

According to the United Nations Forum on Forests, forests play a critical role in the Earth's climate system, most importantly by capturing carbon dioxide. The battle to preserve and protect our public forests requires continual vigilance.

Partnerships—Revitalizing the Communities of Southwest Virginia

FROG—The Forest Recreation Outdoor Group

The Forest Recreation Outdoor Group (FROG) has embarked on an effort to build a network of partners that recognizes the value of local recreational opportunities for the health, education, and growing economies of communities in Southwest Virginia.

This new initiative, led by the Clinch Ranger District and the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, under the leadership of District Ranger Michelle Davalos, has brought together 28 organizations representing local governments, colleges and non-profit environmental and recreational groups. The Clinch Coalition is represented by Board Member Sharon Fisher and Advisory Board Member Phil Shelton.

The 2019-2020 collaborative effort has developed FROG's mission, vision and core values and identified three focus areas to guide its strategic goals: Economic Resiliency, Education, and Health and Wellbeing. This effort has been led by Donna Mattson with the United States Forest Service.

The various organizations comprising FROG's membership have different missions but are coming together to provide outdoor recreational experiences that promote healthy outdoor lifestyles, educate generations for long-term stewardship, and help to revitalize local economies.

SAMS as a Movement Hub

Public outrage gave the groundwork to create the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS). People's anger came from the accidental death of three-year-old Jeremy Davidson, who died when a 1,000 pound boulder, pushed loose by a bulldozer at a strip-mining site, crashed his house. The incident drew nationwide attention and spurred local citizens to action. Begun in 2007 as "an organization of concerned citizens working to build just and equitable communities while addressing current and legacy costs of extraction in our region," SAMS enthusiastically carries this mission forward today.

SAMS Big Stone Gap Community Center strives to be a movement hub, helping local folks access the tools to get involved with movements and environmental activism. Adam Malle, a volunteer who has served as the group's treasurer and administrator, sees SAMS as a "community-led effort to protect and repair our environment while addressing historical injustices."

The Clinch Coalition supports SAMS' objectives and is one of the organizations utilizing the SAMS Center in Big Stone Gap. TCC is fortunate to have another group in our region working to protect and resist violations to the environment. Thanks to a nearly decade-long SAMS effort to stop a strip-mining permit, Ison Rock Ridge in Appalachia, VA still stands.

SAMS continues to expand its scope through initiatives like "Lonesome Pine Mutual Aid", "Families Belong Together" and the "Movement Hub" to help empower the voices of people in Southwest Virginia. TCC's relationship with SAMS symbolizes possibilities when groups work together for the greater good.

NEN— New Economy Network

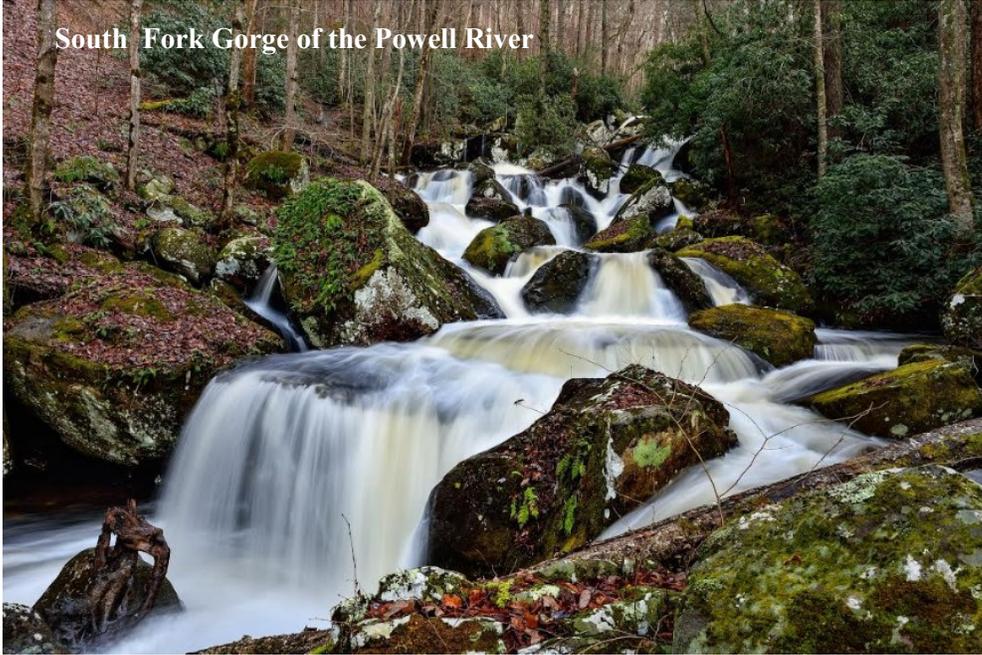
The New Economy Network (NEN) is a regional citizens' group that focuses on sustainable economic development and transition in Southwest Virginia's coalfields. The network serves as an open forum for groups and individuals engaged in economic development, diversification, and transition work in the seven counties of far Southwest Virginia.

Convened by Appalachian Voices, the New Economy Network plays an important role in hosting public discussions and building community power around advancing a grass roots led economic vision. Appalachian Voices states, "America's energy landscape has changed dramatically in recent years, resulting in substantial economic impacts in Central Appalachia, which has historically been driven by the coal industry. The inevitable decline of the coal industry is causing hardship for many families in the region and serves as a wake-up call that now is the time to diversify our economy."

Once held as community gatherings, NEN meetings continue on Zoom. Most recently, a series of virtual community forums were held for every county in Southwest Virginia to get local input on the issue of land access and equity, culminating in a meeting on November 18th to discuss future topics and goals for 2021.

The Clinch Coalition has been a part of this effort to address issues of how citizens in Southwest Virginia can acquire more use of the land held historically by absentee landowners for local farmers, new developments, recreation and conservation efforts. TCC is represented by Board Member, Sharon Fisher and Advisory Board Member, Phil Shelton. NEN is led by Appalachian Voices staff member Austin Counts, who is also on the Board of The Clinch Coalition.

South Fork Gorge of the Powell River



WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT!

Please become a new member or renew your membership. Also consider making a tax-deductible donation. Your support is vital to helping us continue our work. As a small, grassroots organization, The Clinch Coalition is dedicated to working on environmental issues affecting our public lands in Southwest Virginia, as well as advocating for public land protection throughout the United States. Only together can we conserve the national heritage of Southwest Virginia, create excellent recreational opportunities in our National Forest, and build a culture of land stewardship.

Contact Information

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____
Email: (To receive Action Alerts and Updates from The Clinch Coalition) _____
Phone: (Optional) _____



Renew Membership or Become a New Member

____ Student \$10 ____ Individual \$25 ____ Family \$40 ____ Business \$50
Make check to: The Clinch Coalition PO Box 2732 Wise, Virginia 24293

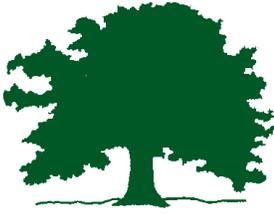
Make a Tax-Deductible Donation

Amount: _____
Make check to: Virginia Organizing *Write on memo line: The Clinch Coalition
Mail check to: The Clinch Coalition PO Box 2732 Wise, Virginia 24293

If you have any questions or want more information, contact us at clinchcoalition@gmail.com.

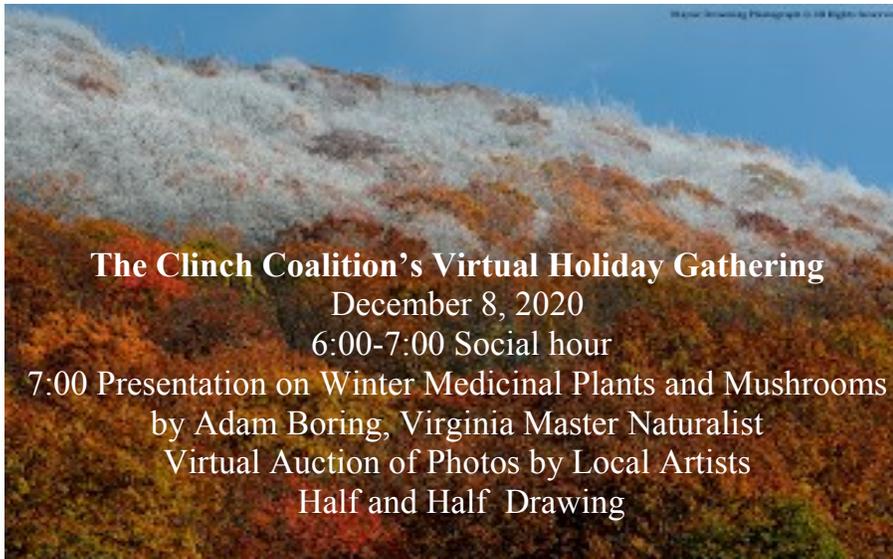
Thank You!





The Clinch Coalition
PO Box 2732
Wise, VA 24293

To:



The Clinch Coalition's Virtual Holiday Gathering

December 8, 2020

6:00-7:00 Social hour

7:00 Presentation on Winter Medicinal Plants and Mushrooms

by Adam Boring, Virginia Master Naturalist

Virtual Auction of Photos by Local Artists

Half and Half Drawing

Get in touch with us...

clinchcoalition@gmail.com

or

Call us at 276-479-2176



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<http://www.clinchcoalition.net/>

It is the mission of The Clinch Coalition to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations.