

Bringing people together to  
protect our natural heritage and  
advance a just transition to an  
equitable clean energy economy

## HARD-WON PROGRESS IN A LANDMARK YEAR | MAY 2021

The past year has been a landmark period in Appalachian Voices' nearly 25-year history of combating fossil fuels and accelerating the shift to an inclusive clean energy economy.

At long last, we celebrated the demise of the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which posed a distinct threat to communities in its path, to the climate, and to our vision for the future. We won game-changing clean energy and environmental victories in our states, removing barriers to distributed solar energy and erecting them against fracked-gas projects like the Mountain Valley Pipeline and MVP Southgate. We advanced legislation in Congress to revitalize coal-impacted communities, and we helped design and promote the blueprint for a national economic transition that is now shaping the White House's agenda.

Your support not only gave us the strength to navigate the uncharted waters of the past year, it positioned us to succeed through challenges we could not have fully imagined. Appalachian Voices has not slowed down in our pursuit of a healthy environment and resilient local economies. We are poised to magnify our impact this year by holding fossil fuel industries accountable for past and present harms, fighting the injustices of our energy system, and securing major investments in the future we must build.

We are eager to pick back up tools the pandemic temporarily took off the table—conversing around living rooms and rallying attendance at large gatherings, hosting community workshops and driving turnout to public hearings. We won't let go, however, of strategies to stay better connected with one another or the lessons the last year reinforced about why we need an energy transition with a human heart and an eye toward justice.

There is simply no denying the scale or urgency of the work at hand; the systems we must change are deep-rooted and far-reaching by design. But as we dig in to halt the power that fossil fuels have amassed over generations and reshape our policy to protect people and preserve the climate, we do so with a recognition of the fundamental change that is within reach.



*Tom*

**Tom Cormons**  
*Executive Director*



*Kate*

**Kate Boyle**  
*Deputy Executive Director*





## BUILDING A NEW APPALACHIAN ECONOMY

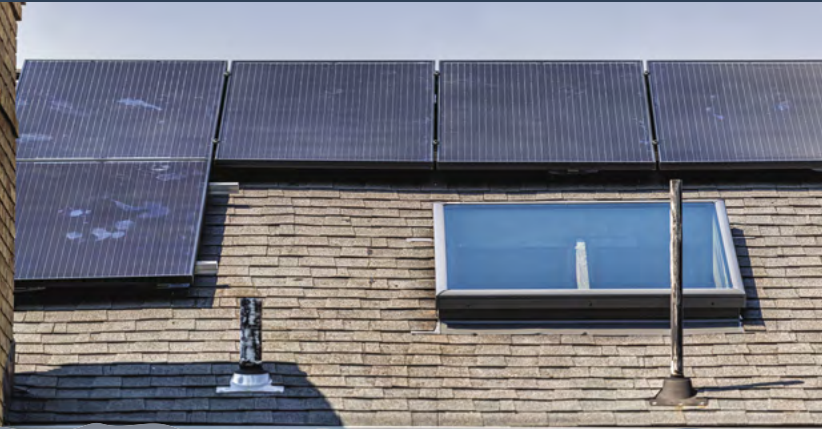
by steering state and federal investment toward sustainable development and bringing beneficial projects to fruition ..... **p. 4**

- **Community-led revitalization for a national economic transition**
- **Solar energy breakthroughs in Southwest Virginia**
- **A land restoration economy takes root**

## ADDRESSING COAL'S COSTLY LEGACY

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- **Legal setbacks for the Mountain Valley Pipeline imperil MVP Southgate**

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# BUILDING A NEW APPALACHIAN ECONOMY



“We need a federal program to ensure the communities that have powered our nation will benefit from the transition to a 21st-century economy—and it has to start from the ground up.”

—Adam Wells, Appalachian Voices Regional Director of Community and Economic Development

## COMMUNITY-LED REVITALIZATION FOR A NATIONAL ECONOMIC TRANSITION

Demands for a just economic transition are echoing in coal-impacted communities across the country. In the lead-up to last year’s election, we coordinated with allies from far-flung regions whose fates have been tied to fossil fuels. Our coalition launched the National Economic Transition Platform last summer to send a unified message to federal decision-makers about the immediate need for policy solutions to build stronger economies for the region.

Following months of close engagement, the White House is heeding our call. Several of the platform’s recommendations—from prioritizing mine land cleanup to expanding renewable energy and energy efficiency—are prominent in the Biden administration’s American Jobs Plan, which promises unprecedented investments in climate solutions and an economy that leaves no community behind.

President Biden also signaled his commitment to a just transition in January when he established a working group of top agency officials dedicated to revitalizing coal communities. We’re engaging closely with the new working group to promote policies that are consistent with Appalachian Voices’ vision.

## SOLAR ENERGY BREAKTHROUGHS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

It has been a standout year in our work to solidify clean energy as a cornerstone in Southwest Virginia's post-coal economy. For two years running, we've secured passage of our top solar policy priorities in the Virginia General Assembly, including the Solar Freedom Act, which removed longstanding barriers to distributed solar for residents, schools, and businesses that deserve access to clean energy and its benefits.

To make the most of our policy success, we launched a unique three-year partnership last September with Virginia-based solar developer Secure Futures that will result in local jobs and at least 10 megawatts of new solar capacity in Virginia's coal-bearing counties.

When it comes to Southwest Virginia's clean energy potential, we're thinking much bigger. At the beginning of 2021, we passed the Brightfields Act, which encourages the construction of large-scale solar projects on former surface mines, and we launched a collaborative project to help local manufacturing companies tap into booming clean energy markets.



## A LAND RESTORATION ECONOMY TAKES ROOT

We're gaining ground in our work to transform abandoned coal mines into assets that will yield long-term economic and environmental benefits. We've helped partners in Southwest Virginia secure over \$2.35 million in federal and state funding— with \$1.2 million more in pending requests—to expand ecotourism and recreation opportunities and revitalize historic town centers, among other innovative projects.

We've profiled projects like these in our reports with the Reclaiming Appalachia Coalition, which is assisting local governments and community groups to bring their creative visions for long-abandoned mines to fruition. Meanwhile, we've never been closer to motivating Congress to carve out far more resources for mine land restoration and the economic opportunity it can create.

Last July, we secured passage of the RECLAIM Act through the U.S. House of Representatives after years of building public and political support. The bill, which would accelerate the distribution of \$1 billion for economically beneficial reclamation, was reintroduced in Congress this March, days before the Biden administration prioritized cleaning up abandoned mines as part of the American Jobs Plan.

# ■ ADDRESSING COAL'S COSTLY LEGACY



## **WATCHDOGGING BANKRUPTCIES IN AN INDUSTRY ON THE BRINK**

For what remains of the Appalachian coal industry, the past year was one of accelerated decline, drawn-out bankruptcies, and environmental enforcement fights. Throughout 2020, we tracked the latest round of company failures putting local livelihoods and coal mine cleanup in jeopardy, with a particular focus on the convoluted case of Blackjewel, LLC.

We analyzed data for hundreds of Blackjewel's mine permits in Appalachian states to ensure the bankruptcy court and the media understood the extent of the company's reclamation liabilities. With a coalition of allies from Appalachia to the western Powder River Basin, we objected to Blackjewel's liquidation plan for all the ways it would shortchange reclamation, shirk environ-

**"This new wave of bankruptcies is escalating risk to people and the environment. It's stressing the entire system of coal mining regulations, which was not designed to withstand the collapse of the region's coal industry."**

*—Matt Hepler, Appalachian Voices  
Environmental Scientist*

mental laws, and set a dangerous precedent for future bankruptcies and coal mine abandonments.

Although the court approved Blackjewel's final bankruptcy plan in March 2021, the case continues to unfold. Over 100 permits in Virginia and Kentucky remain in limbo with disputes over which entities are responsible for environmental cleanup.



## CONFRONTING THE THREATS OF PAST AND FUTURE ABANDONED MINES

The Blackjewel saga underscores the need for strict oversight and serious reform to prevent another generation of abandoned, hazardous mines. We are working to address the multi-billion-dollar backlog in cleanup costs for abandoned mines across the United States and minimize the risks to the public of future mine closures.

We promoted legislation to reauthorize the Abandoned Mine Land Fund that the U.S. House passed last year, and the bipartisan measure was reintroduced alongside the RECLAIM Act in March. But more resources and regulatory reforms are essential to meet the need, especially as funds raised through a fee on current mining shrink.

Shortly after President Biden's inauguration, Appalachian Voices and our allies recommended 15 necessary reforms to the administration covering reclamation compliance, data gathering and transparency, and other critical concerns. We're urging the White House to appoint a leader at the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement who will put the long-term interests of communities in coal mining regions ahead of the short-term interests of an industry in steep decline.



Photo: CDC-NIOSH

## EXTENDING BENEFITS FOR VICTIMS OF BLACK LUNG DISEASE

Last year, we stood with the Black Lung Association in calling on Congress to extend the coal tax that funds the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund. Lawmakers approved a one-year extension of the tax at the end of 2020, but they have not done enough to help miners and their families for the long term.

Appalachian Voices continues to promote legislation to extend the tax through the next decade. We're also demonstrating the need for stronger oversight and federal rules limiting miners' exposure to silica dust—the main culprit in the ongoing black lung epidemic in Appalachia—by analyzing data from the Mine Safety and Health Administration and illustrating persistent instances of noncompliance.

## ■ FIGHTING FRACKED-GAS PIPELINES



### GRASSROOTS POWER DEFEATS THE ATLANTIC COAST PIPELINE

For almost six years, Appalachian Voices fought the destructive 600-mile Atlantic Coast Pipeline in communities, the courts, and in our state capitals—until a sunny day last July, when the monopoly utilities behind the project, Dominion Energy and Duke Energy, abandoned the \$8 billion boondoggle, heralding a shift toward a much cleaner energy future for the entire region.

The project's downfall stands as a milestone in the modern environmental justice movement and exemplifies the power of a multi-racial, multi-generational coalition united against the injustices that undergird our nation's energy policy. The role that frontline communities like Union Hill, Virginia—a historic Black community and the planned site of a massive pipeline compressor station—played in this shared victory cannot be overstated.

Many observers were skeptical that pipeline opponents would, or even could, win this fight. At times the political sway of monopoly utilities and the eagerness of state and federal agencies to greenlight new fracked-gas projects seemed insurmountable. But we forged ahead and helped to build a grassroots movement that eventually overwhelmed the attempt by Duke, Dominion, and the Trump administration to build more unnecessary fossil fuel infrastructure at the public's expense.

As we double down to defeat the Mountain Valley Pipeline and the MVP Southgate extension into North Carolina, we've also strengthened environmental rules in Virginia to remedy the permitting and enforcement flaws that have put communities, clean water, and ecosystems at a disadvantage.

## LEGAL SETBACKS FOR THE MOUNTAIN VALLEY PIPELINE IMPERIL MVP SOUTHGATE

The legal challenges Appalachian Voices and our allies have brought against the 303-mile Mountain Valley Pipeline have compelled federal courts to block defective permits issued by industry-friendly agencies. Last November, judges sided with our coalition and stopped pipeline construction through 1,000 streams, rivers, and wetlands in Virginia and West Virginia until the court could rule on our case.

Rather than suffer another legal defeat, pipeline developers announced in January that they would abandon the one-size-fits-all federal permit and seek individual state permits to cross waterways. This more time-consuming approach has created an opportunity to defeat the Mountain Valley Pipeline once and for all. Delays have led to mounting costs exceeding \$6 billion—up from \$3.7 billion three years ago when the project was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2018.

Federal regulators signed off on the 73-mile MVP Southgate extension last year despite the threat of the same negligent practices exhibited by the Mountain Valley Pipeline. But the project's fortunes shifted in August when, in response to demands from Appalachian Voices and our allies, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality denied a Clean Water Act permit for MVP Southgate, citing the unnecessary risk it would pose to clean water when the path forward for the Mountain Valley Pipeline itself remains so uncertain.

When MVP Southgate took the state to court to challenge the decision, we teamed up with Sierra Club and the Center for Biological Diversity to defend it. This past March, judges ruled that while environmental regulators did not adequately explain why they rejected the permit, the decision was consistent with North Carolina's authority under the Clean Water Act.



**“These destructive pipelines were climate catastrophes and economic boondoggles from the start. They weren’t needed when they were proposed, and they’re even less needed now.”**

*—Jessica Sims, Appalachian Voices  
Virginia Field Coordinator*

# ■ PROMOTING EQUITABLE CLEAN ENERGY



High Country Energy Justice Summit, February 2020

## CHALLENGING DUKE ENERGY'S AGENDA IN NORTH CAROLINA

Since defeating Duke Energy's effort to rewrite utility regulations in fall 2019, Appalachian Voices and our partners have been united against the monopoly's plans to raise rates and hijack North Carolina's energy transition. We've also called on decision-makers to extend and enforce bans on utility shut-offs to protect families throughout the pandemic.

Appalachian Voices intervened in a Duke rate case to illustrate how unjustified cost increases burden lower-income North Carolinians and to encourage regulators to fully consider the problem of high energy burden before approving rate hikes. And we criticized Duke's long-range energy plan, which dangerously delays coal retirements and envisions massive investments in fracked-gas power plants.

**"The pandemic has underscored our need for a democratic and fair energy system. With more local control, we can put community needs like affordable clean energy, worker protections, and a healthy environment above utility profits."**

*—Brianna Knisley, Appalachian Voices  
Tennessee Field Coordinator*

For much of 2020, we were at the table with key allies, state agencies, local governments, and industry to explore paths to achieve carbon neutrality in North Carolina's electricity sector by 2050. We lifted up policies that will equitably reduce emissions and programs that will ensure all North Carolinians benefit from a clean energy transition.

## BREAKING DOMINION'S GRIP ON VIRGINIA'S ENERGY POLICY

Last year in Virginia, Appalachian Voices secured passage of a critical reform to prohibit monopolies like Dominion Energy from charging ratepayers for spending on fossil fuels when cleaner alternatives are more cost-effective. Along with close partners, we also passed the Virginia Environmental Justice Act to ensure environmental justice guides state decisions.

After moving our community engagement online, we continued to host Energy Democracy Tour events virtually to build awareness of ways to make Virginia's energy transition fairer and more inclusive. To that end, we promoted policies during the 2021 legislative session to stabilize energy costs and put commonsense limits on Dominion's power.

Those reforms passed the state House of Delegates with bipartisan support and the backing of environmental and economic justice organizations. But utility allies on a key Senate committee voted them down, underscoring the need for accountability and the political will to end Dominion's stranglehold on state energy policy.



## PRESSING FOR PUBLIC UTILITY REFORM IN THE TENNESSEE VALLEY

After a year of collecting community input on the Tennessee Valley's energy future, last spring we published "The People's Vision for a Democratic, Just and Green TVA," which promotes broader access to clean energy and lays out pathways to necessary change.

We promoted community-led recommendations for the 2023 closure of TVA's Bull Run coal plant, prompting the utility to withdraw applications for new coal ash storage at the site. In August, we sued TVA for locking local power companies into never-ending contracts that restrict their ability to provide cheaper, cleaner electricity to their customers.

Appalachian Voices developed resources and advocated for stronger protections for Tennessee families during the pandemic, stressing TVA's responsibility as the country's largest public power provider. Soon after the election, we assembled a broad coalition of environmental, labor, and social justice allies to call on President Biden to lead on TVA reform.

# 2020 FINANCIAL IMPACT

Thanks to your hard work and generosity, 2020 was our most impactful year yet.

Total 2020 revenue:  
**\$2,895,892**



Major donors:  
**\$1,501,241** **52%**



Grants:  
**\$754,212** **26%**



Government Grants:  
**\$483,889\*** **17%**

\*Includes Paycheck Protection Program loan



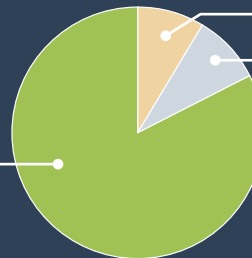
Memberships:  
**\$61,191** **2%**



Other Sources:  
**\$95,359** **3%**

Expenses:  
**\$2,604,601**

Programs 83%



Administration 9%

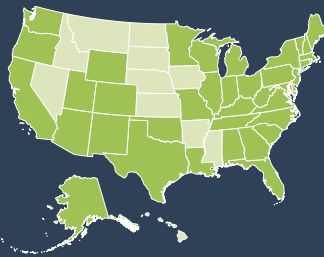
Fundraising 8%

Individual Donors:

**1,116**

Foundation Partners:

**14**



Members in

**41**  
states

\*including Washington, D.C.

Mountain Protectors:

**79**



Appalachian Voices is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator. We put every dollar you invest to good use by keeping our administrative and fundraising costs low in order to maximize our impact.



## READ THE APPALACHIAN VOICE ONLINE

The online edition of The Appalachian Voice continues to inform and inspire through articles that explore the people, places, and creatures of our region, as well as environmental and energy topics that affect our well-being and future.

Popular stories in 2020 covered topics as wide-ranging as trout fishing, the pipeline resistance movement, the opossum, hemp farming, freshwater snorkeling, and fix-it-yourself culture.

For the time being, we are publishing online-only due to the pandemic, and we are sending email digests once or twice a month with recent articles. If you're not already receiving emails from The Appalachian Voice, sign up at [appvoices.org/subscribe](https://appvoices.org/subscribe) and we will make sure you don't miss a story.



## OUR COMMITMENT TO RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY FOR ALL

As we strive to preserve a healthy environment and transition to a more just economy for our region, Appalachian Voices is equally committed to upholding the rights of all of our region's people.

We intend to honor our duty to past, present, and future generations by pursuing equity as both a moral and strategic imperative. We acknowledge that environmental justice and racial justice are inextricable, and that any legitimate vision of climate justice is contingent on realizing them both.

Read more about our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion at [appvoices.org/equity-for-all](https://appvoices.org/equity-for-all).

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Jessica Sims

Your support has helped Appalachian Voices become a powerful force for change. We now have a staff of more than 30 professionals representing centuries of combined experience working in several states.

Founded in 1997, Appalachian Voices brings people together to protect the land, air, and water of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy.

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