Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR) is an interstate coalition representing individuals and groups from Virginia and West Virginia dedicated to protecting water, land, and communities from harms caused by the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure, including the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP).

POWHR members and organizations are part of a growing grassroots movement to stop fossil fuel expansion in Appalachia and to kickstart the transition to a just and renewable future. We integrate the broader context of this pipeline fight into all our work, as part of a united fight to stop all new fossil fuel projects in the United States, to combat environmental injustice and to meaningfully address the climate crisis.
CO-CHAIRS' STATEMENT

Now in our eighth year in the fight against the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP), we remain resolute in our efforts to stop this unnecessary, destructive and toxic pipeline.

We envision a future where protecting water, biodiversity, and our futures are the primary objectives of our state and federal agencies. Where we swiftly transition from fossil fuels to clean renewable energy, with a focus on energy justice and environmental justice. Where Appalachia’s complex web of cultural, social and environmental constituents can thrive together.

We hope you will join us in growing, sustaining and enacting this vision. No matter who is in office, we’ll keep working to protect our communities, mountains and water.

This year, we welcomed Communications Director Denali Nalamalapu to our team. Denali is already innovating how we tell the stories of this long fight, elevating MVP resistance to the national stage and developing relationships with media professionals.

With your support, we will continue to fight for grassroots voices to be not only heard but heeded by our government. Appalachia’s time as a regional sacrifice zone must come to an end. Will you join us to put the final ‘nail in the coffin’ of the Mountain Valley Pipeline?

In gratitude and solidarity,

RUSSELL CHISHOLM
Co-Chair

ROBERTA BONDURANT
Co-Chair
MVP Protest Run
[MVP Mainline Route]
In April and May 2021, three incredible women ran the entire 303 mile length of the MVP in protest of the pipeline. They raised over $15,000 for POWHR and the Monacan Indian Nation Cultural Foundation along the way. The MVP Protest Run’s ‘mastermind’, Mercedes Walters, remarked on what inspired this protest project, saying, “I have been so inspired by the community effort to fight against the Mountain Valley Pipeline, I believe that this fight deserved to be highlighted as a shining example and motivation to the rest of the world.”

People vs. Fossil Fuels Week
[Washingto DC]
Frontline and regional Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) activists joined hundreds of Indigenous and climate activists for the People vs Fossil Fuels week of action targeting the Biden Administration in Washington DC. The demands of the week were for Biden to use his executive power to stop fossil fuel projects, declare a climate emergency and launch a just clean energy revolution. POWHR leadership gave testimony to crowds gathered in front of the White House and called for Biden to take action.

Peoples' Hearing on the MVP
[Virtual]
On October 25th, 2021, when the state failed to provide safe ways for impacted communities and advocates to speak to the MVP Clean Water Act Section 401 Virginia Water Protection Permit, POWHR, Wild Virginia and Appalachian Voices decided to hold our own virtual hearing. Over 40 people gave testimony that was submitted to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the State Water Control Board. We believe that everyone has a right to speak to this proposal in safe and accessible ways, so we created this opportunity for impacted communities and advocates to use their voices.

MVP Southgate Lambert Compressor Station Permit Denial
[Chatham, VA]
The Virginia Citizen Air Pollution Control Board (APCB) held two days of hearings on December 2nd and 3rd on the MVP Southgate’s proposed Lambert Compressor Station in Chatham, VA to decide whether or not to grant a minor new source review permit for the station. In solidarity with Black and Indigenous leaders, POWHR attended the hearings and organized against the proposed MVP Southgate Lambert Compressor Station. Directly impacted communities and advocates’ work and testimony convinced the Virginia Air Pollution Control Board to deny a key air pollution permit on December 3rd, 2021 in a 6-1 decision. The Board determined the permit would have violated the Virginia Environmental Justice Act.
Mountain Valley Watch Project

POWHR’s Mountain Valley Watch project works to hold Mountain Valley Pipeline accountable to environmental regulations, to educate the public about the harms from MVP construction and potential operation, and to help halt construction and operation of MVP. We also provide documentation and education to support demands for improved transparency and meaningfulness in state and federal processes for certifying and regulating fossil fuel infrastructure projects.

Community Testimony on MVWatch Impact

“Mountain Valley Watch volunteers have consistently provided invaluable on the ground and aerial observational support to beleaguered rural landowners striving to challenge MVP/agency misrepresentations about the harms to land and water across Southwest Virginia. MVW staff have added an unparalleled layer of expertise in mapping, numeric and statistical assessment, narrative and photographic material. Through MVW reports to state and federal agencies and key decision makers, POWHR has kept our landowners and communities in the fight.”
- Roberta Bondurant, Preserve Bent Mountain, POWHR Co-Chair

“Mountain Valley Watch grew out of Preserve Giles County's determination to keep VDEQ and FERC under fire after they clearly didn't want to heed our caution that the MVP's route through SW Virginia was disastrous. We purchased our first drone and found Jason Shelton and started monitoring tree felling and grubbing. Along the way the effort was expanded to all the POWHR groups and became an independent entity that has not only provided the knowledge and technology to enable the documentation and submission of hundreds of E&S violations, but also been a huge morale boost to communities who are still in the fight. By participating in MVWatch we know we're still fighting for our water, mountains and culture.” - Donna Pitt, Preserve Giles County

"Mountain Valley Watch (MVW) and POWHR have been tremendously beneficial to the communities they serve, and provided significant value added to my own work as a scientist studying fossil fuel infrastructure and environmental justice in Appalachia. This, in turn, has helped transform my work into products that reinforce the specific aims of MVW and POWHR. Indeed, the two-way relationship that MVW and POWHR have facilitated between individuals like myself is exactly what any non-profit aims to achieve. Successful projects are those that develop lives of their own and continue to evolve and grow well beyond the duration of the project itself. The relationships that MVW and POWHR are cultivating with communities now are the soft infrastructure that is so critical to successful projects."
- Jacob Hileman, an environmental scientist with a Ph.D. in Hydrologic Sciences
POWHR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Maury Johnson, Preserve Monroe

Maury Johnson is one of the two Ex-Com members from WV. He enjoys the outdoors and farming. He has traveled the eastern US and beyond in his fight to protect the environment, property rights and demand a renewable energy future.

Robert Bondurant, Preserve Bent Mountain

Robert Bondurant is a longtime advocate for protection of the exceptional waters and environment of Poor and Bent Mountains, as well as surrounding Appalachian communities and watersheds. She serves with Preserve Bent Mountain and as CoChair of POWHR. She and her husband live in the historic Bottom Creek community, on Tutelo and Monacan land.

Lynda Majors, Preserve Montgomery County VA

Lynda Majors, Executive Committee member from Virginia has been fighting for 7 years locally in Montgomery County to save our source water, maintain private property rights and ensure a sustainable habitable future for our children, grandchildren and.... beagles!

Mark Jarrell, Summers County Residents Against the Pipeline

Mark is a native West Virginian who bought property in Pence Springs in 2003 in order to some day retire here and enjoy the beauty and history of the area. He worked my entire career in the golf industry in Florida, retiring on January 14, 2015, only to find out the very same day that the Mountain Valley Pipeline wanted to bisect his land with their boondoggle. Nearly six years later he is still fighting to prevent the MVP from making the pipeline operational even though they have completed construction on his property.

Russell Chisholm, Preserve Giles County

Russell Chisholm serves as co-chair of the Protect Our Water, Heritage Rights coalition in the campaign to stop Mountain Valley Pipeline and dangerous fossil fuel expansion through Virginia and West Virginia. He is coordinator of the pipeline construction monitoring Mountain Valley Watch project. He serves his community from Monacan and Tutelo territory in Newport, Virginia.
PARTNERSHIP WITH VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

POWHR is able to do this work thanks to our partnership with Virginia Organizing, "a non-partisan statewide grassroots organization dedicated to challenging injustice by empowering people in local communities to address issues that affect the quality of their lives." Virginia Organizing's Director of Programs Eric Olson-Getty sat down with POWHR's Development and Programs Coordinator Grace Tuttle, and shared about our work as a "Featured Community Partner" blog. Here are some excerpts!

"It's a landscape of forests and mountains that is home to human and more-than-human creatures who have held it as sacred for centuries. Now a corporation, backed by government and supposed regulatory agencies, has decided that they need to move fracked gas from one place to another, so they are taking the land, poisoning the water and soil, tearing up the forests and game habitat, destabilizing the mountainsides, and exposing everyone to the dangers of accidents and spills.

But thanks to community-based groups like Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR), they are getting resistance, and it is fierce...POWHR has had a Joint Plan of Work with Virginia Organizing since its inception in 2015, and the coalition includes other Virginia Organizing programs, including Preserve Giles County and Preserve Montgomery County VA.

Tuttle says that, in order for the pipeline fight to succeed, POWHR needs the voices, input, and involvement of community members from across the region. 'Tell us how we can be serving you and how to be better Appalachian leaders in protecting water, creatures, and communities. I need my wider community to take care of themselves so that we can be in this fight for the lifetimes of work it will surely take, and to do so by using your skills and contributing where you feel a mix of passion and duty. Join the movement, in whatever way you can.'"

SUPPORTING POWHR

We’re not giving up, and we’re not going away. We are calling on you to strengthen POWHR’s growth as a movement leader, join us in our commitment to defeat the MVP, and sustain our mission by donating to POWHR. Thank you for your incredible support of our coalition.

To donate, visit: powhr.org/donate, or make a check out to: Virginia Organizing, and put POWHR in the memo line.
Send Checks to: PO Box 809, Pembroke, VA 24136

POWHR operates in a Joint Plan of Work with Virginia Organizing, a 501c3 organization that accepts grants and donations on behalf of POWHR. Virginia Organizing is officially registered with the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23209. You can write to this Department for all relevant financial statements and procedures regarding the solicitation of contributions.
POWHR COALITION GROUPS

Here are some snapshots of what just a few of POWHR coalition's groups have been up to this year.

Preserve Montgomery County (Montgomery County, VA)

In addition to all of PMCVA's advocacy work, landowner support, construction monitoring, media work, educational programs, community building and regulatory participation among other areas of work, Preserve Montgomery County VA continues to hold a series of educational webinars for their membership and the wider MVP fighting network. Some examples have included: Documenting Sacrifice Communities with Special Guest Will Jones, community organizer in Chester, PA with Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living, and Indigenous Communities Fighting MVP and Other Pipelines, featuring Special Guest Jason Crazy Bear discussing his region’s fight against the MVP Southgate Extension pipeline and Indigenous peoples’ history fighting corporate land grabs, both moderated by Matthew Pickett, UVA Wise Communications Professor and published documentary filmmaker.

Bonnie Law, POWHR Steering Representative for Preserve Franklin

Preserve Franklin continues working with Franklin County, VA Board of Supervisors to get financial protections for our county residents, landowners, and taxpayers against MVP’s possible failure or abandonment. Assisting current Pittsylvania County, VA residents regarding MVP Southgate, landowner eminent domain issues, and possible new Lambert Compressor Station with prior Preserve Franklin research regarding MVP mainline since 2016. Preserve Franklin finalized two years of research on federal pipeline permitting, lack of insurability, and construction in floodplains and public comments to FERC, VA DEQ, and USACE regarding problematic areas.

Preserve Franklin continues with attempts to gather data on names/number of deaths of folks who lived along the MVP route for future potential environmental justice work. Preserve Franklin continues to work with newly elected VA House of Delegate member for Franklin County, VA regarding education about MVP mainline landowner and erosion/ sedimentation issues and impacts to Smith Mountain Lake. Preserve Franklin continues to monitor any incoming reports of erosion and sedimentation issues and make appropriate reports to MVW (Mountain Valley Watch), county officials and/or regulatory agencies.

Bonnie Law, POWHR Steering Representative for Preserve Franklin

Preserve Bent Mountain (Roanoke County, VA)

2021 was a tumultuous year of prolonged pandemic, and an intensively destructive months of construction on both ends of the MVP Right of Way (ROW) across Bent Mountain, VA. Mountain ridges, the recharge areas for our drinking water, were blasted and leveled; perched aquifers threatened with blasting, wetlands and streams drilled and broken, heavy equipment scraped stream beds, and rains ran sediment offsite and into our waters. MVP moved so fast they left some areas of the ROW with little to no erosion or sediment protection whatsoever, causing sedimentation to headwater tributaries to Bottom and Mill Creeks. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) ignored alleged violations in favor of MVP completion efforts.

Landowners and community advocates have persevered, engaging with government and church groups, hosting the Protest Runners and Monacan Indian Nation Cultural Foundation Leaders, observing for Mountain Valley Watch, supporting Endangered Species Act litigation, filing state and federal permit comments, traveling to DC and Richmond for People v. Fossil Fuels, “holding out” for eminent domain jury trials, and standing up to MVP and a sometimes hostile judiciary.

We pay tribute below to our friend and neighbor Fred W. Vest, who fought MVP valiantly, relentlessly, from the beginning, through the days MVP landed on his farm in July, and until he passed September 25th. We go forward, carrying the torch for Fred.

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Bonnie Law, POWHR Steering Representative for Preserve Franklin

Photo by Sarah Hazelgrove
POWHR STAFF TEAM

Russell Chisholm, Co-Chair

Russell Chisholm serves as co-chair of the Protect Our Water, Heritage Rights coalition in the campaign to stop Mountain Valley Pipeline and dangerous fossil fuel expansion through Virginia and West Virginia. He is coordinator of the pipeline construction monitoring Mountain Valley Watch project, documenting and reporting potential violations of environmental law and holding regulators accountable to impacted communities. Russell is a United States Army veteran, a coffee roaster by trade, and an environmental and climate justice advocate serving his community from Monacan and Tutelo territory in Newport, Virginia.

Denali Nalamalapu, Communications Director

Denali lives in Washington, D.C. She is originally from Southern Maine and her family is from Southern India. She is passionate about climate action and uplifting the voices of communities most impacted by environmental racism and the climate crisis through her communications work. Denali leads POWHR's media and communications work as Communications Director. You can find her reading a book, painting, or walking in the woods.

Grace Tuttle, Development & Programs Coordinator

Grace lives in Bath County, VA in the Allegheny Mountains. She believes in a more just and livable future for Appalachia where all life is respected and protected. Grace helps with wrangling public participation in governance, growing POWHR's scope of work, creating welcoming, educational events and supporting member groups as POWHR's Development and Programs Coordinator. Grace was a Co-Captain of the UVA Women's Rowing team and is passionate about protecting water and life. Catch her leading one of our new book club events or out in her garden!
SO HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Follow us on social media:

Protect Our Water Heritage Rights

@powhrcoalition

@POWHRCoaition

Sign up for our newsletter!

We send out stories, updates on the MVP fight, calls to action and events. POWHR's newsletter is THE way to make sure you never miss an opportunity to get involved in the movement!

Sign up by visiting this link: http://eepurl.com/hwoIXj

Or scan this QR code:

Visit our website at powhr.org

You can find resources, stories, press releases, information about our Mountain Valley Watch construction monitoring project, regulatory process guides, and much more on our website. Don't forget to check out our blog at powhr.org/powhr-blog! 

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REMEMBER: rivers and streams should look like this...

NOT Like This:

Donate Today, POWHR.org

We Keep Fighting So That THIS Stops Happening

Photos by Matthew Pickett