



The House Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2020

Dear Chair Grijalva and members of the House Committee on Natural Resources,

The Alliance for Appalachia is a regional coalition that promotes a healthy, just Appalachia by supporting member organizations in communities impacted by destructive resource extraction. Our coalition brings together some of the most experienced groups across the region to share resources, strategize for collective impact, and organize for a just transition that lifts up all people.

We believe that we can turn extractive economies into regenerative economies through a just transition that redresses past harms and creates new relationships of power for the future. In Appalachia, we believe in the resilience of our communities and our culture. Because of this, we have organized ourselves to resist.

In this spirit of resilience and resistance, The Alliance for Appalachia supports the Environmental Justice For All Act, which is landmark legislation rooted in the moral principle that all people have the right to clean air, water, and soil.

We know that our region is not unique and that we are not alone in our pursuit for justice. Environmental racism and oppression plague communities across the country in the name of profit and people of color and low-income individuals suffer first and worst. We support the EJ For All Act because it amends and strengthens Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to prohibit such discrimination and allow private residents and organizations to seek legal remedies.

Across our region, mountaintop removal coal mining devastates the landscape, turning beautiful, plentiful forests into ugly, barren lands that destroy our ecosystems. Mountain forests are being ripped from their place; the rock and dirt is pushed into nearby streams and valleys, which buries and pollutes the waterways that provide millions of Americans with drinking water. The U.S. EPA estimates that more than 2,000 miles of vital Appalachian headwater streams have been buried and many more are being poisoned. We know that water is life, and yet we have witnessed countless violations of the Clean Water Act at mines across Appalachia.

From polluting abandoned mine lands and dangerous coal ash to the deadly black lung disease, the legacy costs of coal are pervasive long after mining has stopped. Coal company bankruptcies push the cost of reclamation and healthcare back on to communities who are already struggling, allowing the people most responsible for the harm to skirt accountability. And yet, extreme coal mining practices aren't the only form of extraction in Appalachia.

Members of the Alliance are also resisting a huge petrochemical buildout in the Ohio Valley, where elected officials and the oil and gas industry are telling residents it's their only hope for jobs. We know this is not true and we know the environmental and health impacts of this industry by following the experiences of our comrades in the Gulf South.

The Environmental Justice For All Act would ensure that communities have the tools to protect themselves and fight back against harmful industries. It requires federal agencies to consider cumulative impacts before projects are permitted that would threaten clean air and water. It gives communities a voice in proposed actions affecting environmental justice by mandating the National Environmental Protection Act and establishing the National Environmental Justice Advocacy Council.

Finally, we support the EJ For All Act and its promise to support environmental justice communities through a fair and just transition by establishing a new grants program and the Federal Energy Transition Economic Development Assistance Fund.

For justice,

The Alliance for Appalachia

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth ● West Virginia Highlands Conservancy ● Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition Coal River Mountain Watch ● Appalachian Voices ● Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment ● Center for Coalfield Justice ● The STAY Project ● Heartwood Sierra Club Environmental Justice ● Southwings ● Highlander Education and Research Center ● Keepers of the Mountains ● Black Warrior RiverKeeper