



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 from across the region to share resources, strategize for collective impact, and organize for a just transition that shifts from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. This includes building local and political power to redress past harms and lift up all people.

The Alliance for Appalachia supports the Environmental Justice For All Act ([H.R. 2021](#)) as legislation rooted in the moral principle that all people have the right to clean air, water, and soil. We need the safeguards included in this bill to ensure that these rights are a reality.

We know that our region is not unique and that we are not alone in our pursuit of 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.**

The cumulative impacts of coal mining in our region are pervasive and devastating to communities across our region and beyond. Fossil fuel extraction like coal mining impacts the environmental and human health of workers and communities. Mountaintop removal coal mining devastates the landscape, turning beautiful, plentiful forests into ugly, barren lands where native plants and animals struggle to thrive. The U.S. EPA estimates that more than 500 mountains have been destroyed by mountaintop removal and over 2,000 miles of streams have been buried with many more being poisoned by heavy metals and toxins.

We know that water is life, and yet we have witnessed countless violations of the Clean Water Act at mines across Appalachia. While the industry may be on the decline globally, mountaintop removal mining is not over. Just last year, the WV Department of Environmental Protection approved a 1,085-acre MTR permit on Coal River Mountain, and a few months ago, approved a 1,112-acre Paint Mountain MTR permit on Paint Mountain, despite the [overwhelming evidence](#) that communities near mountaintop removal have significantly higher rates of birth defects, serious disease, and mortality.

Before coal is ever extracted, [mountains are blown up](#) with war-like explosives to expose coal seams. During the extraction process, workers breathe in silica dust that leads to the [deadly black lung disease](#), and the same dust falls on communities below, often less than a mile from

the site. This process buries headwater streams and poisons our drinking water. **When mining is finished these companies skirt reclamation responsibilities and leave behind polluted abandoned mine sites for taxpayers and community members to clean up.**

Further down the supply chain, coal-fired power plants are the largest single [source](#) of carbon dioxide emissions around the world. **The waste created from burning coal, coal ash, is similarly dangerous to the surrounding communities, and again is disproportionately dangerous to communities of color who have often had to bear the burden of storing the waste.**

Julie Bledsoe of Powell, Tennessee, who shared part of her family's story during the House Natural Resources Committee 2020 [EJ Now Tour](#), has been directly impacted by the dangers of coal ash:

"My husband worked to clean up the Kingston Coal Ash Spill. He was a healthy life long non-smoker and he now has COPD. I would like to share the dangers of coal ash. There are coal ash sites in EJ communities and all over our Nation that must be cleaned up. The cleanup workers and communities must be protected. What happened at Kingston must never happen again. Coal Ash is currently classified as non-hazardous, but it is deadly for humans to breathe. Workers at Kingston were denied respiratory protection. There are now over 50 workers dead that worked on the Kingston Coal Ash Spill cleanup. Many more are sick."

And yet, extreme coal mining practices aren't the only form of extraction in Appalachia. Members of the Alliance for Appalachia are also resisting a [huge petrochemical buildout](#) to process fracked gas 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 whose home is now referred to as "Cancer Alley."**

The impacts of fossil fuel extraction reach beyond environmental injustices. In a region like ours, economies are inextricably linked to and impacted by the boom and bust cycles of extraction. For example, property taxes and royalties from coal [fund local school systems](#). When trucks hauling coal destroy our roads, it's county taxes that have to repair them. When companies [deny workers their health benefits](#), it's taxpayers that foot the bill. When they file bankruptcy and walk away from reclamation responsibilities, it's [taxpayers that are footing the bill](#). And when our water is poisoned, it's up to us to find safe sources to drink and bathe that are often more expensive and labor-intensive than a public system.

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 health impacts under the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act in making permitting decisions and ensures that permits will not be issued if projects cannot demonstrate a reasonable certainty of no harm to human health. And, it requires permitting authorities to

determine that there exists a reasonable certainty of no harm to the health or general population, or to any potentially exposed or susceptible subpopulation located in or immediately adjacent to the area of the major source.

We believe that we can achieve environmental justice by building power in communities and connecting people of all backgrounds and identities from geographically and culturally disparate places. We lean on people's personal experiences to tell the stories and perspectives necessary to reach strategic decisions. This bill is no different. As members of the Environmental Justice Working Group with the House Natural Resources Committee, we know this legislation is based on principles defined and demanded by people like our members who are on the frontlines of environmental injustices. Had it been in place decades ago, it could have saved our communities and our mountains from the corporate greed that has robbed us of life-sustaining natural resources. **We support its passage so we can right the wrongs already done and protect future generations.**

For the mountains and the people,

Members of the Alliance for Appalachia

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth • West Virginia Highlands Conservancy • 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 • The Clinch Coalition

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