

I Love Mountains Day 2010

Stream Saver Bill Talking Points

1. The U.S. EPA reports that about 1,400 miles of Kentucky's headwater streams have been buried or significantly damaged by valley fills between 1981 and 2005. This figure represents a distance that is slightly more than the distance between Pikeville, Kentucky and Denver, Colorado. There is good reason to believe this number to be a significant undercount of the actual extent of stream damage.

(Source: U.S. EPA Environmental Impact Statement, 2003 and the update in 2008)

Message: Enough is Enough! The coal industry has been allowed to destroy too much already. Kentucky must stop the destruction of our state's most vital natural resource — our water!

2. Radical strip mining technically may be called "area," "contour," "point removal," "steep slope," "surface" and other terms as well as mountaintop removal. Dozens of permits are granted each year for these types of mining — all of which bury streams with valley fills.

Message: All forms of radical strip mining are highly destructive no matter what they are called. These industry claims — that there is very little mountaintop removal going on — is a deliberate attempt to distort what is taking place in our coalfield communities.

3. According to state and federal studies, siltation and sedimentation directly associated with resource extraction account for more than half of all stream impairments across the coalfields. 42% of streams in the Kentucky River Basin have been impaired by siltation and sedimentation; 41.9% of streams in the Cumberland River Basin and 85.7% of streams in the Big Sandy River Basin have been impaired by siltation and sedimentation.

(Source: Kentucky 303(d) Report to Congress "List of Impaired Waters," 2004)

Message: Substantial evidence proves that valley fills from coal mining are having a devastating and costly affect on our headwater streams and major rivers. Waterways are the social and economic lifelines of our communities, and that means all Kentuckians share the cost.

4. In a study by ECU's Eastern Kentucky Environmental Research Institute that sampled more than 7,000 miles of streams across a six-county area in eastern Kentucky, 70% of the water samples came back as "bad." These water samples had at least one parameter on the extreme range for iron (from acid mine drainage), conductivity (from metals and sedimentation) or extremely high or low pH levels. *(Source: Environmental Research Institute, 2007)*

Message: Scientific research confirms what we've known about for years — the consequences this destructive mining practice is having on our state and nation's water are severe and widespread. Pass the Stream Saver Bill and stop the destruction of our water and preserve this resource for present and future generations.

5. Mining waste, such as dirt and rock in valley fills, slurry in sludge ponds and fly ash, contains high concentrations of naturally occurring heavy metals, including selenium and mercury--both of which are hazardous to human health. When the waste is dumped into the water supply or seeps into the water table underground, adults and children in downstream communities who ingest this water and / or eat fish from the water are at risk for severe health problems. Mercury can cause neurological damage and behavioral problems, as well as death in extreme cases.

Water samples from streams affected by valley fill practices contain higher levels of mercury than unmarred streams (Clean Air Task Force, Cradle To Grave Report). Low blood levels of selenium are associated with increased risk of spontaneous abortion, cancer and higher cancer mortality rates (National Institutes of Health). Both mercury and selenium make fish unsuitable for eating. There is currently a standing statewide health advisory about fish caught from Kentucky rivers, lakes and streams. Due to heavy metal contamination, it is considered unsafe for adults to eat more than 1 fish per month and generally unsafe for children and pregnant women to eat any (Ky Dept of Fish and Wildlife).

Message: Dumping mining waste into valleys is toxic to the health of our children and families. Not only does the waste add hazardous heavy metals and other toxins to fresh water that will be consumed by people downstream, but it also seeps into the water table, ruining well-water quality for many coalfield residents.

6. In 2005, the Kentucky Department of Surface Mining issued 79 full waivers from the Stream Buffer Zone rule, resulting in 149 named streams being buried and forever eliminated. This practice continues unabated. Buffer zone waivers are illegal unless it can be proven that dumping mining wastes into streams has no adverse impact — which is pretty unbelievable. *(Source: Information collected by John Wilborn from the KY Department of Surface Mining, 2005)*

Message: Public protection agencies are ignoring, not enforcing, simple laws to protect the Commonwealth's waterways. The Stream Saver Bill is needed to stop the burying of Kentucky's vital headwater streams that feed into four major rivers.

7. **It is totally unnecessary to dump mining wastes into streams and valleys. It is done only because it is more convenient and more profitable for the coal companies. This issue is not about allowing a certain type of mining practice to continue or not, it is about corporate greed at the expense of Kentucky's health and future!**

A Helpful Glossary of Terms

Clean Water Act (CWA): The CWA is the primary federal law that prohibits water pollution. In recent years it has been ignored and altered by the Bush Administration to allow mountaintop removal to pollute and bury streams.

Headwater Streams: The streams that form the origination of rivers and an area's waterways. For Kentucky, many of our headwater streams that create our major river systems (Big Sandy, Kentucky, Upper Cumberland and Licking) start in the mountains of eastern Kentucky.

Iron: A naturally occurring mineral in eastern Kentucky geology. Dissolved iron in streams is associated with coal seams and suspended iron is associated with clay and sandstone in storm water runoff. High iron content is what makes streams turn orange.

pH: The acidity or basic nature of water. High pH levels are associated with surface mine runoff or limestone and low values are associated with Acid Mine Drainage. Low pH can lead to leaching of metals.

Sedimentation: Sedimentation refers to the suspension of solid materials in water, and it is the most serious pollutant in eastern Kentucky streams. Sedimentation obstructs and alters healthy aquatic ecosystems, increases water treatment costs, decreases the economical and recreational value of water bodies and leads to deposits of sedimentary material in and along waterways, changing erosion patterns and increasing flooding.

Siltation: Silt is a sedimentary material consisting of particles of soil or grains of disintegrated rock that may occur as suspended sediment in water, or also as deposits at the bottom of a water body.

Valley Fill: The filling valleys and their streams with the "overburden" the trees, dirt, rock and other matter that made up the mountains tops — from mountaintop removal operations. Valley fills can contain millions of tons of overburden, rise several hundred feet, be up to a mile long and bury hundreds of acres of healthy forest.