

Clean Water Protection Act Introduced in Congress with Record 117 Cosponsors:
Act Would Protect Mountain Streams and Communities, Groups Confident It Will Pass in 2009

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The Alliance for Appalachia www.TheAllianceForAppalachia.org

For a list of current co-sponsors visit: <http://www.theallianceforappalachia.org/cwpa-cosponsors/>

WASHINGTON, DC – The Clean Water Protection Act has just been reintroduced by Representatives Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), Dave Reichert (R-WA) and John Yarmuth (D-KY) with 117 Cosponsors, including 17 members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee into the United States House of Representatives. The bill will protect communities and water quality by outlawing the dumping of mining waste into streams.

"The Clean Water Protection Act is the first broad Congressional initiative aimed at reversing the Bush Administration's eight-year effort to savage our national waterways and the popular laws that protect them," Robert F. Kennedy, Jr said, explaining his support of the bill.

The Clean Water Protection Act was introduced to address a 2002 Bush administration executive rule change that altered the long-standing definition of "fill material" in the Clean Water Act. The new definition permits mining waste to be used to fill streams, allowing companies to blast apart mountains for coal and place the resulting millions of tons of rubble, or "excess spoil" into nearby valleys, creating "valley fills" that cover hundreds of acres of land and bury hundreds of miles of streams.

"Congress meant for the Clean Water Act to protect our nation's water resources; the Administrative rule change endangers those resources," said Rep. Pallone, the author of the legislation. "The dangerous precedent set by the Bush Administration's rule change undermines the Clean Water Act."

The Clean Water Protection Act has taken on an increased urgency following a widely critiqued 4th Circuit Court decision February 13th that allows companies to conduct mountaintop removal without acting to minimize stream destruction or conducting adequate environmental reviews.

"We're hopeful the Obama administration, which has said they are opposed to mountaintop removal coal mining, will be responsive to the public outcry against mountaintop removal," said Ann League, of Save Our Cumberland Mountains in Tennessee. "The 4th Circuit Court decision makes it even more urgent that the president and Congress move quickly to stop this destruction."

At the close of the 110th Congress, 153 co-sponsors had signed the Clean Water Protection Act. Members of the regional coalition The Alliance for Appalachia are confident that the bill could pass the House in the 111th Congress.

"On one side of the debate, you have a majority of the public who wants to end mountaintop removal, you have a President that agrees, you have a rich and vibrant grassroots movement within the Appalachian coalfields working to protect their communities, and you have a Congress that is promoting clean energy and environmental issues," said JW Randolph of coalition member Appalachian Voices. "On the wrong side of the debate are less than a handful of senior congressmen and senators who are promoting devastating Bush-era rules."

"Washington is finally starting to pay attention to our struggles in Appalachia," said Carolyn Van Zant, a West Virginia volunteer with the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, who traveled over seven hours to Washington at the end of January to encourage legislators to support the bill. "Over 470 of our mountains have been destroyed, and over 1,400 miles of streams have been buried. My county, Mingo County, has some of the poorest health and highest poverty in the United States. Mountaintop removal is ruining our community with blasts and flooding – and it is literally making us sick."

"We live in a so called free country--but our basic needs are not being met. In the US today, clean water is a luxury – a luxury my family does not have access to," said Erica Urias, a member of Kentuckians For The Commonwealth.

The Alliance for Appalachia is a regional coalition of 13 groups in 5 states working to end mountaintop removal coal mining and support the creation of a just, sustainable economy in Appalachia. Members include: Coal River Mountain Watch, SouthWings, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program, Save Our Cumberland Mountains, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, The Appalachian Citizens Law Center, Appalshop, Heartwood, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development and Appalachian Voices.

Visit www.TheAllianceForAppalachia.org for more information.