

HIGH KNOB HERALD

How SMRs were (wrongly) introduced to SWVA

In October of 2022, Governor Youngkin came to Norton, VA to announce his nuclear energy ‘moonshot,” putting a Small Modular Reactor (SMRs) in Southwest Virginia. This was an invitation-only affair. Local reporters were told to meet in a parking lot where they were bussed to an undisclosed site, away from any risk of public scrutiny.

How we got involved

In response to the Governor’s announcement, The Clinch Coalition (TCC) joined with Appalachian Voices, the Appalachian Citizens Law Center, and the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards to issue a press release calling for more transparency and involvement of the local residents. What followed were numerous print and online articles with local and state officials touting the safety of SMRs, that they would be located on isolated abandoned mine land, and would bring economic development to the waning coal industry in Southwest Virginia.

The Clinch Coalition Governing Board decided to navigate a new area of advocacy - raise public awareness and provide information on the dangers that nuclear energy and its radioactive waste can bring to SWVA. Since its founding in 1998, TCC has been a local, environmental non-profit focused primarily on confronting commercial logging in the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest, protecting streams and wetlands,



In October of 2022, Governor Youngkin clandestinely came to Norton, Virginia to announce his nuclear energy plan.

volunteering for trail maintenance, and providing educational and recreational opportunities on our public lands.

In 2023, TCC began partnering with the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, the Appalachian Peace Education Center, the Wise County Chapter of Virginia Organizing, and the Alliance for Appalachia. There is an outpouring of local residents joining our efforts and taking on leadership roles. This grassroots movement is called SWVA Nuclear Watch. We have over 1,900 followers (and growing) on our Facebook page, SWVA Nuclear Watch. Our on-line petition has over 1,000 signers and hundreds more have signed on at our community meetings in Clintwood, Pound, Wise, Norton, Coeburn, St. Paul, Big Stone Gap, Dungannon, and Stickleyville. The online petition can be found at [clinchcoalition.org/smrs](https://www.clinchcoalition.org/smrs) under Take Action Now, where you will also find information on Small Modular Nuclear Reactors.



Jane Branham, Lauren Albrecht, and Sheila Shell protest outside the UVA Wise Convocation Center while Governor Youngkin holds another invitation-only meeting, even barring the press.

The Clinch Coalition Celebrates 25th Anniversary

In January of 2023, The Clinch Coalition entered its 25th year of advocacy and education. This milestone is a huge achievement for a grassroots organization of our size. As TCC continues our mission to protect and preserve the forest, wildlife, and watersheds in our National Forest and surrounding communities for present and future generations, we are extending our efforts for environmental and social justice.

Over these years, TCC has preserved a treasure trove of papers and artifacts that have been kept primarily in boxes and scrapbooks. From the fall of 2021 to January of 2023, UVA Wise students enrolled in classes taught by Dr. Jinny Turman, Associate Professor of History, worked on various phases of The Clinch Coalition's 25th Anniversary Project. We have since unveiled their digital archive creation on our website, www.clinchcoalition.org/archive, that supporters may view to travel through our years of advocacy.



The Clinch Coalition welcomes newest Governing Board member, Kara Dotten

Kara Beth Dotten grew up in Wise, Virginia. She graduated from the University of Virginia's College at Wise in 2019 with a degree in Visual and Performing Arts. Kara is the Programming Coordinator with the WMMT 88.7 FM radio station, which broadcasts mountain people's music, culture, and social issues, 24 hours a day at 88.7 FM and online at wmmt.org.

Kara currently serves on the Board of Trustees for the Pro-Art Association and is a member of the High Knob Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalist program. In her spare time, Kara is an avid hiker and nature photographer. TCC's President, Sharon Fisher, stated, "The Clinch Coalition is delighted to have Kara join us, whose first act as a Board member was to offer her graphic skills to help TCC educate the public of the dangers of nuclear energy. Her love of nature and willingness to work for environmental protections are exactly the characteristics TCC values." Thank you for your contributions, Kara!



SWVA residents participate in UVA Climate Study



UVA researchers Ryan Denker and Rachel Kinzer, left, were taken to the top of Black Mountain to view the mountaintop removal site adjacent to the town of Appalachia. Their guides were, right to left Emma Kelly, Appalachian Voices; Jess Mullins Fullen, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS); Terran Young and Lauren Albrecht, SAMS and Virginia Organizing. Program Director Jay Tyler, TCC, also attended. Photo by Sharon Fisher.

The University of Virginia has started a series of climate change investigations through their Environmental Institute. Wise County is one of their study areas.

The Clinch Coalition hosted two UVA researchers for their Climate Restoration Initiative study. They interviewed residents and organizations with knowledge of local land use politics and practices and how they would react to carbon sequestration approaches.

Participating were 16 local residents representing The Clinch Coalition, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, Virginia Organizing – Wise County Chapter, Appalachian Voices, the Clinch River Valley Initiative, and four UVA College at Wise faculty members.

The Clinch Coalition attends UVA Wise Economic Forum

The Clinch Coalition sought to expand our small modular nuclear reactor (SMnR) awareness efforts through tabling at local events. At the UVA Wise's Economic Forum, TCC passed out a brochure that touched on the dangers and risks that SMRs pose for the area as well as the concerns and lack of transparency on the part of politicians, appointed officials and a nuclear industry lobbyist.

We also listened to a presentation by pro-SMR speakers and openly questioned the safety of bringing radioactive waste to our region. The Clinch Coalition prioritizes green energy solutions such as solar that are proven effective, safe, and sustainable.



TCC Program Director Jay Tyler (left) and Development Director Melissa Hines (right) table at the UVA Wise Economic Forum. Photo by Sharon Fisher.

TCC Celebrates 25th Anniversary at 17th Annual High Knob Naturalist Rally

September 23, 2023 was The Clinch Coalition's 17th annual rally! Much like the previous year, this year was a success! The morning was rainy, but we were thrilled to see that there were once again over 110 people in attendance!

The rally included experts, volunteers, students, and attendees that wanted to show their love of nature. Presentations were on a wide array of topics ranging from reptiles and rock formations to trail safety. There were also hikes for attendees and lunch provided in part by Subway.

Live music was once again performed by the High Knob Ramblers. Nursing students from Mountain Empire Community College, under the direction of TCC board member Tauna Gulley, Professor of Nursing at the University of Pikeville, managed a health station. UVA Wise students managed the registration center.

Thank you so much to the members of our community for making the event a success. Plans are already underway for next year, and TCC strives to make each year better than the last. See you at 2024's rally!



A UVA Wise Student enjoys the snakes provided by All Are Gods Creatures.



Live performance of the High Knob Ramblers at the High Knob Recreation Area Amphitheater.



*Group photo of attendees of the 2023 Naturalist Rally.
All photography by Bill Harris*



Cupcakes provided by Lincoln Road in celebration of TCC's 25th Anniversary.

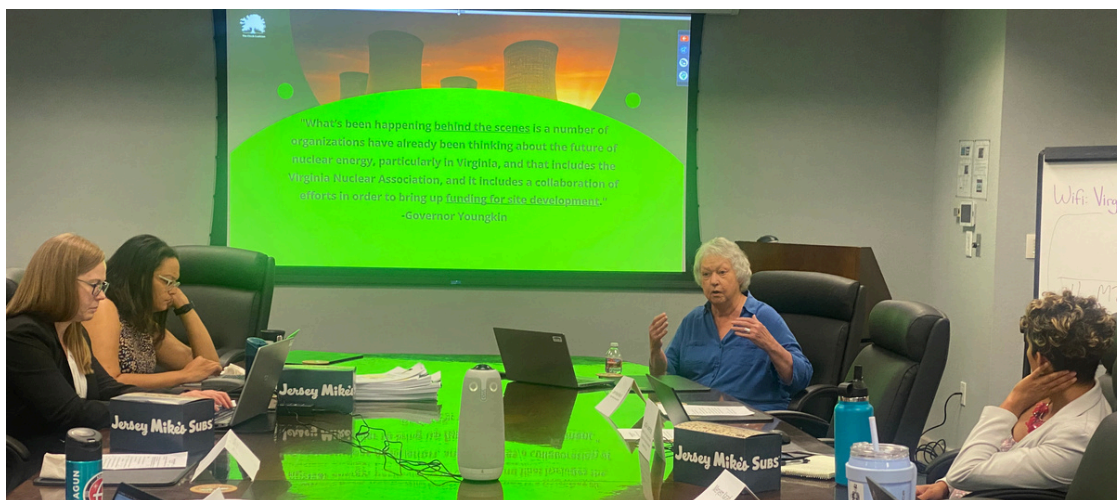
The Clinch Coalition presents in Charlottesville to the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice



Left to Right: Awke Starnes, Lauren Albrecht, Gena Kiser, Jane Branham, Laura Miller, Sharon Fisher, and Jay Tyler are in attendance. Photo by Terran Young.

On August 8, 2023, eight residents of Southwest Virginia attended a meeting of the Virginia Council on Environmental Justice (VCEJ) in Charlottesville. The purpose of the VCEJ as stated in the Code of Virginia is “to advise the Governor and provide recommendations that maintain a foundation of environmental justice principles intended to protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate impacts of pollution.” As such, these eight residents traveled to the council meeting to present their concerns about the onrush to put nuclear reactors in our coalfield region. Those attending were Lauren Albrecht, Jane Branham, Sharon Fisher, Gena Kiser, Laura Miller, Akwe Starnes, Jay Tyler and Terran Young representing The Clinch Coalition, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, and the Wise County Chapter of Virginia Organizing.

A presentation by Sharon Fisher, president of The Clinch Coalition, provided an overview of the swift actions by government officials over the past ten months to pass legislation and seek millions of taxpayer dollars without public engagement. During the public comment period, Lauren Albrecht, Jane Branham, Laura Miller and Akwe Starnes with the Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards and the Virginia Organizing Chapter spoke about their love of living in our mountainous region, long-fought battles against mountaintop removal, and seeing once again Southwest Virginia being offered up as a “sacrificial” zone by big money special interests. The Clinch Coalition would like to thank VCEJ for allowing members of the community to speak on this issue. **VCEJ UPDATE: Governor Youngkin has vetoed a 2024 General Assembly bill “... that would have required long-running vacancies on the state’s environmental justice council be filled, an issue which has, for months, made it difficult for the group to attain a quorum at meetings and do its work.”** Source: Virginia Mercury, March 14, 2024.



TCC President Sharon Fisher speaks about the impact of SMRs. Photo by Jay Tyler.



Terran Young and Awke Starnes. Photo by Jay Tyler.

10th Annual Hellbender 10k 2023



Photo by Bill Harris

Congratulations to this Year's Winners!

Overall Male
Jeremy Donahue

Overall Female
Haley Sykes

Masters Male
Andrew Shelton

Masters Female
Meiwah Cheng



TCC hosted its 10th annual High Knob Hellbender 10K on October 7, 2023. Seventy-five runners participated in the six-mile climb from downtown Norton to the High Knob Tower. Katie Dunn, event coordinator, did a superb job making the event fun and successful for all.

The contributions of the City of Norton each year are enormous and we appreciate their support of the Race. Given that this was the Hellbender's 10th anniversary, it marks an amazing milestone. Katie says her goal is 100 runners.

As always, TCC is grateful to the many local volunteers and sponsors, particularly local businesses that have helped to make the Hellbender a signature event for the region and such a long-term success.

If you or someone you know would like to be involved in the High Knob Hellbender for 2024, you can reach out to us at info@clinchcoalition.org, or you may find more information at <https://highknobhellbender.wordpress.com/race-day/>.

A complete list of participants and race photos can be found at the event website at <http://highknobhellbender.wordpress.com>.

TCC gives a fresh start to their membership program

As The Clinch Coalition closed out our 25th anniversary, we recognize a large part of our ability to advocate and support Southwest Virginia depends to a large extent on support from that very same community. We thank our long-standing supporters, some since our founding, and recent members. We are reaching out for new members to join us so we can continue to amplify our voice. Our voice is your voice. When you become a member of The Clinch Coalition, you are not only showing your support for an organization, you are also actively involved in our advocacy. You can attend our meetings, volunteer at events, and participate in our partnership opportunities. Please consider making a charitable donation and joining The Clinch Coalition today.

www.clinchcoalition/donate.



Volunteers for USFS working on bridge repair at Phillips Creek.

TCC Continues Working Towards its Partnership with USFS

Throughout 2023, volunteers with The Clinch Coalition assisted the USFS' Clinch Ranger District on their volunteer projects, which included maintenance of several trails, removing the invasive Autumn Olive, and attending their Native Seed Collecting Volunteer Workshop in October. Several volunteers received chain saw certification.

One major project was clearing the Phillips Creek Trail loop and repairing two bridges. This project was led by volunteer Debbi Hale, working with the USFS' Brandon Olinger. The Clinch Coalition supports the residents in the Pound area who want to bring back the Phillips Creek recreation area and the Cane Patch campground.

TCC continues to seek a formal partnership agreement rather than a volunteer agreement with USFS, which will allow TCC to take on more hands-on projects for which the Forest Service may not have the staff and funding. Over the past few decades, the Clinch Ranger District has had its staff and funding greatly diminished.

Earth Day Hike

Earth Day 2023 on April 22nd featured a hike by The Clinch Coalition's Hiking Club on the Chief Bengé Scout Trail. TCC's Hiking Club leads monthly hikes, weather permitting. For information on future hikes, contact the TCCHikingClub@gmail.com.

Earth Day 2024 featured The Clinch Coalition at the Farmer's Market in Abingdon from 9:00 am – to 1:00 pm on Saturday, April 20th.



(Top) TCC Hiking Club badge created by Board member Gena Kiser



(Left) A salamander found while hiking, by Wally Smith.

Show Your Support for TCC Today!

Now is the time to become a new member or renew your membership. Also, consider making a tax-deductible donation.

Your support is vital to helping us continue our advocacy for a clean and protected environment. In 2023, The Clinch Coalition celebrated its 25th year dedicated to working on environmental justice for our communities and protecting our forests, waters, and the vast biodiversity of Southwest Virginia. Only together can we conserve our natural heritage, create excellent recreational opportunities, and build a culture of land stewardship.

Contact Information

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Email: (To receive The Clinch Coalition's Monthly Newsletter)

Phone: (Optional) _____

Renew Membership or Become a New Member

___ Student \$10 ___ Individual \$25 ___ Family \$40 ___ Business \$50

Make check to: The Clinch Coalition, P.O. Box 2732, Wise, VA 24293

Make a Tax-Deductible Donation

Amount: _____

Make check to Virginia Organizing and write on memo line: The Clinch Coalition

Mail check to: The Clinch Coalition, P.O. Box 2732, Wise, Virginia 24293, or go to clinchcoalition.org and click on Donate.

Paypal/Credit Card: Go to clinchcoalition.org and click on Donate to be linked to TCC's PayPal.

If you have any questions or want more information, contact us at info@clinchcoalition.org.

Thank You!

Follow us on Social Media!



info@clinchcoalition.org



Instagram
[@clinchcoalition](https://www.instagram.com/clinchcoalition)



www.facebook.com/theclinchcoalition/



Newsletter Contributors

Writers: Sharon Fisher, Jay Tyler

Photographers: Bill Harris, Kara Dotten, Jay Tyler

Layout: Jay Tyler

TCC Board Members 2023

Officers

Sharon Fisher, President

Stickleyville, VA

Wally Smith, Vice Pres.

Wise, VA

Bill Harris, Secretary

Big Stone Gap, VA

Gena Kiser, Treasurer

Pound, VA

Staff

Steve Brooks, Associate Director

Nickelsville, VA

Melissa Hines, Development Director

Salyersville, KY

Jay Tyler, Program Director

Big Stone Gap, VA

Governing Board Members

Wayne Browning

Wise, VA

Kara Dotten

Wise, VA

Frank Frey

Norton, VA

Tauna Gulley

Clintwood, VA

Russ Gillenwater

Rogersville, TN

Gerry and Joe Scardo

Clintwood, VA

Diana Withen

McCall, ID

Advisory Board

Jessica Bier

Pound, VA

Kristen Davis

Charlottesville, VA

Maxine Kenny

Nickelsville, VA

Mark Miller

Lexington, VA

Jim Moran

Abingdon, VA

Hugh O'Donnell

St. Paul, VA

Phil Shelton

Wise, VA

Dave Skinner

Duffield, VA

Honorary Members

Dick Austin

Abingdon, VA

Martie Bell

Gate City, VA

Detta Davis

Coeburn, VA

Tom Gillenwater

Rogersville, TN

Teresa Guice

Rogersville, TN

JR Moore

Coeburn, VA

Nancy Ward

Coeburn, VA

Harry Warren

Gate City, VA



The Clinch Coalition