Mode of Program Participation
Community Organizing and Educational Programming

Participation Type
Roundtable

Session Title
Grassroots Forest Defense: Past, Present, and Future Models

Session Abstract or Summary
This roundtable draws together leading activists and thinkers to discuss citizen efforts to protect the Appalachian region’s National Forests. These federal lands encompass over 6 million acres of the globe’s richest temperate forests, and contain countless biological treasures. Appalachian citizens have mounted innovative and effective grassroots campaigns to protect many of these lands from clearcutting and other large-scale threats. The panel includes perspectives from West Virginia’s Monongahela, Virginia’s George Washington, and North Carolina’s Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests. The U.S. Forest Service is currently revising its management plan for the Pisgah and Nantahala, and grassroots activists Rob and Mary Kelly, Will Harlan, and Josh Kelly will report on recent developments and citizen efforts there. Forest scholars Kathryn Newfont and Chris Bolgiano will frame these and other protectionist efforts in broad historical and contemporary contexts, drawing on research and experience in the Monongahela and George Washington. The panel includes biology, forestry, and history expertise along with its activist “reports from the field.” Its many award-winning activists, writers, and thinkers will offer ideas about future challenges and strategies alongside past and present efforts.

Kathryn Newfont, University of Kentucky
Chris Bolgiano, James Madison University
Will Harlan, Friends of Big Ivy
Josh Kelly, MountainTrue
Mary Sauls Kelly, Madison County Forest Watch
Rob Kelly, Madison County Forest Watch

The View from Monongahela: Appalachians Making History

Presentation #1 Abstract or Summary
Newfont will discuss the “Monongahela case,” a landmark suit brought by West Virginians that changed U.S. forest management policy in the 1970s and continues to shape it in the present day. Activism in response to the Pisgah, Nantahala, and George Washington National Forest management plans discussed in the other presentations is all made possible by the 1976 National Forest Management Act. The act, precipitated by the successful anti-clearcutting Monongahela suit, requires public input to national forest management planning. West Virginians’ influence on national forest policy thus continues to be powerfully felt on the 40th anniversary of this watershed legislation.

At-A-Glance Bio- Presenter #1
Kathryn Newfont is with the University of Kentucky history department and Appalachian
Presentation #2 Abstract or Summary
The U.S. Forest Service finalized its management plan for the George Washington National Forest in 2014. Chris Bolgiano will reflect on her experience with the planning process, her assessment of the final plan, and her ideas for future forest protection efforts. Fracking threatened the George Washington during the public process, and "local opposition" helped prevent its going forward. A planned pipeline still may trouble these commons woods. But the Appalachian national forests sequester carbon, and this role as carbon sink may offer possibilities for future protection. Our National Forests, if left alone to operate as carbon sinks, may be our best regional defense against climate change.

At-A-Glance Bio- Presenter #2
At-A-Glance Bio- Presenter #4

Rob and Mary Kelly have explored and advocated for Appalachian forests as a team since they met at a fiddle festival in Virginia in 1984. They moved to a small farm adjacent to a remote section of Pisgah National Forest when Mary accepted a job with the regional grassroots group Western North Carolina Alliance in 1988. They were soon schooled in grassroots forest organizing by their feisty neighbors in the Shelton Laurel community, who had already stood together against several USFS projects, as well as by the many members of WNC Alliance during the Alliance's successful "Cut the Clearcutting" campaign and Forest Task Force efforts. Their combined experience in forestry, ecology and rural sensibilities has forged a powerful partnership. Shortly after Mary left her job with WNCA in 1995, the Kellys became volunteer leaders in a coalition that stopped a large logging and road development plan aimed at Bluff Mountain on Pisgah National Forest near Hot Springs, Madison County NC. They reflect on their decades of experience working to protect Bluff Mountain, as well as on recent developments affecting Bluff in the forest management planning process.

At-A-Glance Bio- Presenter #5

Mary Sauls Kelly is from California, earned a B.S. in Biology from UC Santa Barbara (1978), and worked as a field biologist on threatened and endangered species for 5 years in California and Nevada before returning to graduate school in 1983. She earned a PhD in Ecology in 1988 at the University of Georgia. Seeking to move to the Appalachian mountains she took a job as Coordinator for the WNC Alliance in 1988. Her work included grassroots organizing, media campaigns, analyzing Forest Service documents, drafting appeals and participating in the formulation of 1994 Amendment to the Nantahala-Pisgah Forest Plan. She also taught Ecology as an adjunct at UNC Asheville. She was a coordinator of a national gathering of clearcutting opponents in Asheville as well as a large conference on Eastern Old Growth Forests. Along with Rob, she helped lead the Bluff Mountain campaign (1995-97) and found the Bluff Mountain Music Festival. Last spring, she and Josh Kelly worked together on the Bluff Mountain BioBlitz that provided new information to the Forest Service about the biological diversity of Bluff Mountain.

Presentation #4 Abstract or Summary

As Public Lands Field Biologist with the Western North Carolina Alliance and later MountainTrue, Josh Kelly has played a leading role in the forest management planning process for the Nantahala and Pisgah. He advocates for responsible forest decision-making and works closely with both the Forest Service and with grassroots citizens’ groups such as Madison County Forest Watch and Friends of Big Ivy. With an eye on both biology and politics, in this field report Josh offers his region-wide perspective on challenges and opportunities in the forest management planning process.

Presentation #5 Title

The View from Bluff Mountain: End of an Era?

Presentation #5 Abstract or Summary

Rob and Mary Kelly have explored and advocated for Appalachian forests as a team since they met at a fiddle festival in Virginia in 1984. They moved to a small farm adjacent to a remote section of Pisgah National Forest when Mary accepted a job with the regional grassroots group Western North Carolina Alliance in 1988. They were soon schooled in grassroots forest organizing by their feisty neighbors in the Shelton Laurel community, who had already stood together against several USFS projects, as well as by the many members of WNC Alliance during the Alliance's successful "Cut the Clearcutting" campaign and Forest Task Force efforts. Their combined experience in forestry, ecology and rural sensibilities has forged a powerful partnership. Shortly after Mary left her job with WNCA in 1995, the Kellys became volunteer leaders in a coalition that stopped a large logging and road development plan aimed at Bluff Mountain on Pisgah National Forest near Hot Springs, Madison County NC. They reflect on their decades of experience working to protect Bluff Mountain, as well as on recent developments affecting Bluff in the forest management planning process.

Presentation #6 Title

The View from Bluff Mountain: End of an Era?

Presentation #6 Abstract or Summary

Rob and Mary Kelly have explored and advocated for Appalachian forests as a team since they met at a fiddle festival in Virginia in 1984. They moved to a small farm adjacent to a remote section of Pisgah National Forest when Mary accepted a job with the regional grassroots group Western North Carolina Alliance in 1988. They were soon schooled in grassroots forest organizing by their feisty neighbors in the Shelton Laurel community, who had already stood together against several USFS projects, as well as by the many members of WNC Alliance during the Alliance's successful "Cut the Clearcutting" campaign and Forest Task Force efforts. Their combined experience in forestry, ecology and rural sensibilities has forged a powerful partnership. Shortly after Mary left her job with WNCA in 1995, the Kellys became volunteer leaders in a coalition that stopped a large logging and road development plan aimed at Bluff Mountain on Pisgah National Forest near Hot Springs, Madison County NC. They reflect on their decades of experience working to protect Bluff Mountain, as well as on recent developments affecting Bluff in the forest management planning process.
Rob Kelly is an Alabama native and 1981 graduate (B.S.) of the Auburn University School of Forestry. He worked for several years as a procurement forester for a lumber company in north Florida that purchased timber off the Appalachicola National Forest. He also worked as a technician at the University of Georgia's Institute of Ecology and Savannah River Ecology Lab. He volunteered as one of the many foresters that were active with the WNC Alliance in their efforts to reform US Forest Service practices. He also was a leader in the campaign to save Bluff Mountain, a co-founder of the Bluff Mountain Music Festival, and the instigator of the Hot Springs Mountain Club and a new network of foot trails in the Bluff Mountain area.