

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 18, 2015

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PRESS RELEASE

From Coast to Coast, Rural America Joins Hands Across Our Land

Today, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League announced support of communities across the country “standing in solidarity” in resistance to fossil fuel extraction, transportation and exportation with the nationwide action: Hands Across Our Land.

Grassroots groups in eight states—Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Texas, Ohio, and Oregon—joined by “holding hands” with others across the nation to call attention to the plight rural America faces from the fossil fuel industry. “Hands Across Our Land empowered people to stand united against an industry concerned only with corporate profit and its attempts to decimate our homes and communities,” stated BREDL’s Virginia Coordinator Mara Robbins.

In North Carolina, Valerie Williams, the spokesperson for BREDL chapter “Concerned Stewards of Halifax,” said their group is participated in Hands Across Our Land because “the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline carries fracked gas and threatens the environment, public health and safety, and landowner rights.”

Doddridge County Watershed Association Hands Across Our Land coordinator, Wayne Woods, stated: “West Virginia is ground zero for the fracking industry and we would like to show the rest of the country that there are people who live here who *do* care about their environment and we feel it is important that this careless and devastating practice of extraction be stopped.”

Preserve Monroe, WV, a grassroots citizens group fighting the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline, celebrated a week ago when Circuit Court Judge Robert Irons handed down an unusual but welcomed victory. Irons ruled the Mountain Valley Pipeline could not prove public need and would not be allowed access to

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private property without landowner approval. Jessica Abramson, Preserve Monroe's Hands Across Our Land coordinator, comparing it to a David vs. Goliath fight, stated, "It is hard when you not only have to fight the natural gas industry, but your elected officials too. We are happy to stand hand-in-hand with others across West Virginia and elsewhere who are fighting these same battles."

In Maryland and Oregon, grassroots groups are fighting proposed liquefied natural gas export terminals. The Calvert Citizens for a Healthy Community group are fighting Dominion's Cove Point Terminal. Leslie Garcia, their coordinator, proclaimed, "Hands Across Our Land is confirmation of our commitment to stop the fracking, the pipelines, the compression stations and everything else that gives Dominion's export plant a reason to exist. Our hands were linked at the same time as our allies across our affected states. " Rogue Riverkeepers Hands Across Our Land coordinator, Sarah Westover, found herself battling two proposed export facilities, "one of which will be the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the state."

Free Nelson founder and Episcopal priest, the Reverend Marion Kanour, wondered, "What could our world become if corporations were guided by environmental and social responsibility rather than greed?" Free Nelson, an anti-pipeline group in Virginia, began organizing Hands Across Our Land last May.

BREDL Virginia Organizer and Hands Across Our Land campaign coordinator, Sharon Ponton, said that her goal is to call attention to the plight of rural communities, to build solidarity and to make connections. Ponton said, "Rural America will not be a sacrifice zone for the energy industry in their attempts to put profit before people. Today, these grassroots groups and many others stood up together to protect the watersheds of millions of Americans from dangerous drilling practices, to stop their homes and families' health from being put at risk, and to use their collective voices to loudly proclaim that their land will not be stolen by the misuse of eminent domain." She added, "Our elected officials should listen to the people."

#HandsAcrossOurLand