

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

www.BREDL.org PO Box 88 Glendale Springs, North Carolina 28629 BREDL@skybest.com (336) 982-2691

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Sharon Ponton | freenelson3@gmail.com | (434) 420-1874

Mara Robbins | mara.robbins@gmail.com | (540) 808-8357

Rebecca Dameron | becdameron@cox.net | 540-759-0798



PRESS RELEASE

Mountain Communities Build Unity and Solidarity for Pipeline Battle

Today, Preserve Bent Mountain and Preserve Floyd, chapters of the multi-state Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, joined with communities across the country opposing fossil fuel extraction, transportation and exportation in the nationwide action: Hands Across Our Land. Grassroots groups in Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Texas, Ohio, and Oregon stood together in their local communities “holding hands” with others across the nation to call attention to the plight rural America faces as the fossil fuel industry attempts to decimate their homes and communities.

“Hands across our lands are so much better than the 150 foot wide, 300 mile long scar that would be gouged by the construction of the proposed Mountain Valley Pipeline,” said Rebecca Dameron, a resident of the Bent Mountain community and a member of Preserve Bent Mountain. “We need to handle our lands carefully—with our hands—not with excavation equipment and hazardous materials.” Dameron, among many other landowners in Bent Mountain, has spent weeks patrolling the winding roads on the border of Roanoke and Floyd Counties trying to make sure surveyors were not trespassing on the properties of her friends and neighbors who had refused entry. “It’s good to get together with our neighbors from Floyd and know that we’re not alone,” Dameron continued. “They know what this fight is like because they were the first to be surveyed.”

Mara Robbins, a founding member of Preserve Floyd who joined the regional battle for environmental democracy by becoming the Virginia Coordinator for BREDL, said: “It is imperative for us to stand together in the face of the industry’s attempts to divide and conquer. It is a challenge to set aside our strong opinions and

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our petty differences and work together effectively, side by side, but we've done it. And we will continue doing it. We live here. We're not afraid. We're not tired."

Residents of Floyd County and Roanoke County met on the Blue Ridge Parkway, just a short distance from the border of the two counties, with signs, songs, and the spirit of support. They were grateful to the grassroots group, "Free Nelson," for coming up with the idea. "From the very beginning, we depended on Nelson County to guide us and let us know what lay ahead," said Robbins. "Preserve Floyd reached out to Nelson as soon as we found out about the proposed MVP, because they had been standing strong in their resistance to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline for months before we knew what was headed our way. We're proud to stand with Nelson County today, as well as communities all over the nation facing similar fights."

BREDL Virginia Organizer and #HandsAcrossOurLand campaign coordinator, Sharon Ponton, conceived the project to call attention to the plight of rural communities, to build solidarity and make connections. She 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 loudly proclaim in unison that their land will not be stolen by the misuse of eminent domain."

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a 31-year old community-based, non-profit environmental organization with chapters in seven states. Our founding principles are earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice, and community empowerment. www.BREDL.org