



ABRA Update #334 – June 2, 2022

Issue Highlights . . .

- Northern long-eared bat should be declared endangered
- An Adieu from Lew Freeman
- A message from Allen Johnson, Chair, ABRA Board of Directors
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Northern long-eared bat should be declared endangered

Twenty-four conservation groups, including ABRA, have voiced strong support to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for the agency to finalize designating the northern long-eared bat as an endangered species. The groups' May 23 letter to FWS, sent on their behalf by the Southern Environmental Law Center, said:

The northern long-eared bat has long warranted protection as an endangered, rather than merely threatened, species. In the short time since the species was listed as threatened, its population numbers have continued to decline precipitously, including in the southernmost portions of its range. As highlighted in our below comments, southern populations of northern long-eared bats face increasing pressures from habitat destruction and climate change, which will further compound recovery efforts in our region. At the same time, there are promising signs that some populations in warmer climates, such as the Southern United States, may be better able to withstand white nose syndrome, underscoring the importance of protecting populations in our region. Our groups urge the Service to expeditiously issue a final rule reclassifying the northern long-eared bat as endangered and work to recover the species throughout its range, including in the South.

For a copy of the groups' letter, click [here](#).

An Adieu from Lew Freeman

I announced two months ago that I would be stepping down as Executive Director of the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance in June. Today is my last day.

I've had the privilege of helping co-found ABRA in 2014 and serving as its first Chair until assuming the role as staff head. It has been an exhilarating nearly-eight years, during which I have met and worked with hundreds of wonderful people. Those relationships have been the greatest reward to me personally.

The ABRA Board of Directors has not yet made a decision on new staff leadership. For the time being, any general communications or questions to ABRA

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should be directed to Allen Johnson, Chair of the ABRA Board of Directors, at allen@eight-rivers.org. Communications about ABRA's Conservation Hub program should be directed to Rick Webb at rwebb.481@gmail.com.

I hope to be able to stay in touch with many of you in the future. My contact information remains lewfreeman@gmail.com and 540-468-2769.

All the best to everyone.

A message from Allen Johnson, Chair, ABRA Board of Directors

As Chair of the Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, speaking on behalf of the Board of Directors, we commend and thank Lew Freeman for his extraordinary and competent leadership. Lew developed, coordinated, and empowered diverse peoples and organizations into the collective ABRA force that was significantly instrumental in defeating the colossal Atlantic Coast Pipeline project. In the almost 2 years since that victory, Lew has worked to steer ABRA in development of the Conservation Hub, supporting the effort to defeat the MVP, and other endeavors.

Lew's intellect, creativity, organizational ability, and personal touch have served our communities well. We wish Lew happiness for his future, and of course will often call upon his wisdom and insight as ABRA presses forward.

- Allen Johnson, Chair
Kate Boyle, Larry Thomas, Rick Webb, Randy Kesling, Judy Rodd, Ben Luckett, David Sligh

Opportunity to comment on commercial gold mining in Virginia

As previously reported, the Canadian exploration company, Aston Bay, has been performing exploratory drilling for gold across central Virginia, and advertizing their finds internationally. As one of the most environmentally destructive activities undertaken by humans, modern industrial-scale gold mining saddles host communities, and those downstream, with long-term environmental damage.

The National Academy of Sciences is conducting a statewide study of the likely impacts of such projects. Information about the study and gold mining in general can be found on the [NAS' project website](#). A link to submit comments can be found to the right of the opening summary. Comments should be submitted as soon as possible, as the NAS will begin writing its draft report in July.

The Virginia Department of Energy (formerly Mines, Minerals & Energy, or DMME) is also interested in receiving public comments on the study. A link to the online comment forum, and other related information can be found [here](#). Comments are due by September 30.

Also, for Buckingham County residents *only*, a local ordinance has been proposed that aims to protect the health, safety and general welfare of the residents and natural environment of Buckingham County from the effects of large-scale gold mining. To learn more about the proposal and to sign on to the petition to have it presented to the Buckingham County Board of Supervisors, click [here](#).

Finally, for more information on this topic, see the Friends of Buckingham [website](#), and its dedicated [page](#) on stopping commercial gold mining in Virginia.

In the News:

Regional Issues

Opinion: It's not too late to call it quits on the Mountain Valley Pipeline

- The Washington Post – 6/1/22

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/06/01/its-not-too-late-call-it-quits-mountain-valley-pipeline/>

MVP is years from completion under the rosiest of scenarios, and it is likely to never finish construction.

Nuclear will be major for Virginia's electric grid as utilities decarbonize, regulator says

- Virginia Mercury – 5/27/22

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/05/27/regulator-says-nuclear-will-be-more-important-to-virginias-grid-as-utilities-decarbonize/>

SCC examiner recommends approval of Dominion relicensing plans for North Anna and Surry plants

Port of Virginia Plans to Run on 100-Percent Clean Electricity by 2024

- The Maritime Executive – 5/25/22

<https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/port-of-virginia-plans-to-run-on-100-percent-clean-electricity-by-2024>

Predatory residential solar installers could sow mistrust, advocates fear

- Virginia Mercury – 5/25/22

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/05/25/as-residential-solar-grows-more-popular-advocates-worry-about-consumer-protections/>

With solar becoming increasingly common in Virginia, concerns are increasing that an influx of predatory solar companies into the state could leave consumers saddled with heavy costs and sow distrust in the energy source.

Federal solar import investigation slows Virginia projects

- Virginia Mercury – 5/23/22

<https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/05/23/federal-solar-import-investigation-slows-virginia-projects/>

Dominion, Appalachian Power say they don't expect significant financial or project timeline impacts

Turning wind into power off the Wilmington coast could be a decade away

- Star News – 5/23/22

<https://www.starnewsonline.com/story/news/2022/05/23/wind-farms-built-coast-north-carolina-take-decade-clean-energy/9794260002/>

Public comments again sought on Botetourt County wind farm

- The Roanoke Times – 5/20/22

https://roanoke.com/news/local/public-comments-again-sought-on-botetourt-county-wind-farm/article_f51ecea0-d892-11ec-b649-4361654f156e.html

Big Picture:

For 50 years, governments have failed to act on climate change. No more excuses

- The Guardian – 6/2/22

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/02/for-50-years-governments-have-failed-to-act-on-climate-change-no-more-excuses>

Conflict and Covid make these troubling times, but national leaders must cooperate and take action now.

FERC shakes up Northeast renewables with grid rule phaseout

- E&E Energywire – 6/1/22

<https://www.eenews.net/articles/ferc-shakes-up-northeast-renewables-with-grid-rule-phaseout/>

FERC allows the phaseout of the Minimum Offer Price Rule, or MOPR, that prevented some renewable energy projects from participating in wholesale energy auctions...basically stranding them with no customers.

Biden wants to rebuild the EPA. He doesn't have the money to do it.

- The Washington Post – 5/31/22

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/05/31/epa-biden-climate-chemical-safety/>

'Our budget situation is such that we're at real risk of years-long delays,' one official warns.

Supreme Court rules Biden admin can use climate Metric

- E&E News – 5/26/22

<https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Supreme-Court-rules-Biden-admin-can-use-climate-in-regulations-EE-News-5-26-22.pdf>

The federal government's current estimate of the social cost of greenhouse gases marks a significant shift from the much lower values adopted by the Trump administration.

FERC enforcement ramp-up spurs pipeline wars

- E&E News - 5/25/22

<https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/FERC-enforcement-ramp-up-spurs-pipeline-wars-EE-News-5-25-22.pdf>

Related:

- <https://www.abralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Federal-pipeline-safety-rules-face-legal-challenge-EE-News-5-25-22.pdf>

As Natural Gas Expands in Gulf, Residents Fear Rising Damage

- US News & World Report – 6/2/22

<https://www.usnews.com/news/us/articles/2022-06-02/as-natural-gas-expands-in-gulf-residents-fear-rising-damage>

There are neighborhoods in Southwest Louisiana that have endured seven federally declared disasters in just two years. Another question: Is it wise for the LNG industry to spend tens of billions to build there??

Here are ways to connect clean energy projects to the grid more quickly

- Canary Media – 5/31/22

<https://www.canarymedia.com/articles/policy-regulation/here-are-ways-to-connect-clean-energy-projects-to-the-grid-more-quickly>

We've been hitting this hard lately, but it's a crucial part of the energy transition. Though lengthy, this article explains the issues a bit more clearly.

The NY Bight could write the book on how we build offshore wind farms in the future

- Popular Science – 5/22/22

<https://www.popsci.com/science/new-york-bight-offshore-wind-farm/>

Related:

- <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/research/assessing-wind-speeds-potential-performance-across-atlantic-offshore-portfolio>