

X-M Satellite Radio

The Bob Edwards Show

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"Exploding Heritage"

Bob Edwards: The Appalachian Mountains were standing before the Ice Age; they're nearly 300 million years old. They've survived everything nature's thrown at them, but they might not survive man. Using a mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil, mining companies are blowing up mountains to get to the valuable coal deep inside. The mountains and the coal they contain dominate the local economy and shape the culture of Appalachia. But mountaintop removal is ravaging the land and the people of the region.

Male Voice: It's like we're a forgotten land. It's like people are willing to sacrifice the Appalachian area so that they can get what they feel is cheap energy.

Male Voice: If the price of cheap power is to destroy the landscape and the ecology of eastern Kentucky, it's not worth it. It's just not worth it.

Male Voice: There's still a lot of mountains. There'll be 93 percent of the mountains of Appalachia will still be there. What we're doing is impacting a small percent for the benefit of the future generations.

Bob Edwards: Today on "The Bob Edwards Show," "Exploding Heritage: The Controversy Over Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining."

Male Voice: I was raised in this area and I hunted back here when I was just a child, and I just love this mountain, and I still love it.

Bob Edwards: Daymon Morgan is 80 years old. He lives in Leslie County in the Appalachian Mountains of eastern Kentucky.

Daymon Morgan: We have blackberries back here. You've never seen as many blackberries as grow back here. I picked 14 gallons of blackberries here and seven gallons last year. I like that. I like things of nature that way.

Bob Edwards: His home sits on a green oasis surrounded by ugly gray industrial sites. They used to be mountains as lush and green as his mountain, but coal companies exploded the mountaintops and pushed the trees, the soil, and the rock over the side into the hollows between the hills, sort of connecting the plateaus that used to be mountains, and forming long, wide mesas. If there were streams running through the hollows, they are buried under the debris that the coal industry calls the over burden.

Daymon Morgan: I was raised right over that hill there. My dad owned it. And that mountain there, this mountain here

was higher than that top yellow you see. Those two mountains came way up there. Down between them is a beautiful creek, and we lived down next to that creek. Well now, that creek is filled up, and when they push that mountain, they're going to take the rest of that mountain down or push it over. Pretty soon it'll be even with that and you walk across there. It used to be about 70 or 80 feet down there was a beautiful creek running down there, went all down through yonder, but not no more.

Bob Edwards: The coal companies want Daymon Morgan's land, too, but he won't sell to them. Mountaintop removal would destroy more than his home. It would rob him of his culture and his heritage. The forest on his mountain, for example. He learned from generations before him that nature provides more than shade and a home for animals. The forest is a pharmacy.

So what's good for what?

Daymon Morgan: Well, sassafras is a blood thinner, red sassafras. I use that as a blood thinner. And you take that cherry birch, it's a good blood tonic. It purifies your blood. And then of course the polk berries. I know people use it for arthritis. People will tell you they're poison. No, they're not poisonous. If they had been, I had been killed.

Bob Edwards: Mountaintop removal is not a new process, but it's used much more often since federal regulations have been altered and acts of Congress circumvent it. And while it destroys the mountains, eliminates forests, berries, streams, and kills habitat for wildlife, it's done with the approval and cooperation of those state and federal agencies whose duty it is to protect the environment. Public officials have given the energy industry what it wants. Mining coal this way is cheaper, safer, and more efficient than traditional deep mining in shafts burrowed into the mountains.

Eric Reese: Well, if you think of Appalachia like a layer cake, you have these really scenes of sandstone, and you have thin scenes of coal in between them.

Bob Edwards: Eric Reese wrote a book about mountaintop removal coal mining called Lost Mountain.

Eric Reese: And they'll just blast down 200 feet till they heat a seam of coal, scrape that out, load it onto trucks, send it to 22 other states, and blast down to the next seam until you just are left with a completely demolished landscape.

Bob Edwards: The destruction of the mountains is a direct result of our need for cheap electricity. While coal is dirty and pollutes the air, it is the cheapest, most transportable, and by far the most plentiful source of energy.

Bill Caylor (phonetic sp.) is the president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Caylor: Coal is important to our economy. It's important to our national security. We have the cheapest electrical rate in the country at 4.3 or 4.6 cents per kilowatt hour. That allows a lot of poor people to keep that air conditioner on during the summer. Until we have another form of energy to create our electricity, without question we have to have coal mining.

Bob Edwards: The coal industry says the coal now buried in the United States could supply our energy needs for the next 250 years, and the industry can't seem to get it out of the ground fast enough. A hundred tons of coal are extracted from the earth every two seconds. Then it's hauled away by truck and train to the power plants that supply us with the electricity we need to keep our lights on, our TV sets blaring, our computers running, and our cell phones charging. But Bill Caylor says most of the mountains will be spared.

Bill Caylor: People arguing over a small, less than seven percent of the areas that has been, is being, or ever will be impacted by mountaintop removal. It's a very small percent.

Eric Reese: You know, that's like going to the doctor and having your doctor say six percent of your lung is

cancerous, and you asking to operate, and he says, no, no, no, let's just leave it. Keep smoking; it's good for the economy. To say it's only six percent is not to say that it isn't going to stop. It's only going to stop with people putting intense pressure on our so-called leaders and on these companies to do something different.

Bob Edwards: And Eric Reese notes that while Appalachia contains a fortune in coal, the people who live there don't get to share the wealth.

Eric Reese: And that's the most bitter irony of all is that Kentucky has so many natural resources. And if you look at the Appalachian Regional Commission's 40th anniversary study of what has happened since Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, that the counties that have had the most surface mining are the counties that are the poorest. And so their natural riches are taken away, and they're repaid with dirty streams, dirty air, cracked foundations, cracked wells. And the money goes to Peabody Coal. It goes to Tampa Energy. It goes to Massey Energy.

Bob Edwards: Residents who should be profiting from coal are calculating its costs instead. John Rourke lives in Perry County.

John Rourke: We're paying the price. The people here in eastern Kentucky, we're getting the bad effects from it, and

they're enjoying the electricity down in Florida and other places. They say it's a cheap source of energy. Well, it's not so cheap if you live here and you see your water is destroyed and all these other things.

Bob Edwards: There's a cost to those of us from outside the region, too. The poisoning of the watershed is not good for anyone. For 50 years Tom Gish has published the Mountain Eagle newspaper in Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Tom Gish: The important thing that the Appalachian area has is water, and water in great abundance. This particular county is a head water of much of the nation's water supply, certainly the eastern United States. And you've got to ask, if we're going to level every mountaintop in the Appalachian area, what are you doing to it then as a source of the nation's water supply? What is the nation going to do when California and Texas and Arizona really do run out of water as sooner or later they're going to do?

Bob Edwards: Rider, farmer, and conservationist, Wendell Berry is one of those who can't help but feel that the systematic demolition of the country's oldest mountains is just somehow wrong.

Wendell Berry: It's that old, and you destroy it for the sake of burning the coal and destroying it also forever. One of the things that upsets me about mountaintop removal is that

it seems to me to be part of a trend. It in itself proves absolutely our willingness to destroy this world. And as I look at it from here and from the other rural landscapes that I've seen, I think that the difference between that and the rest of rural America is that it's simply going faster there than we're able to make it happen here.

But we're ruining all of it. We just have to face that. Our economy at the place where it meets the landscapes is violent, it's toxic, it's community destroying, it's family destroying. And there is no perception of it in the places that matter, or maybe only indifference. I feel like that rural America is Third World. It's all designated as a sacrifice area, and the people who profit from it and the people who are living from it simply complacently feel entitled to it.

[MUSIC PLAYS.]

Bob Edwards: We'll visit an active mountaintop removal mine site when "Exploding Heritage" returns after the break.

[BREAK].

Bob Edwards: Mountains figure prominently in religion. Moses, Noah, Jesus, and Mohammed all had important business on high places. Yet Scripture is rough on mountains. The Bible instructs man to subdue the earth and have dominion over nature. The Koran says, "Thou seest the mountains and thou

deemest them affixed. Verily they are as fleeting as the clouds." And the prophet Isaiah was more specific. He predicted that the mountains would be leveled and the valleys filled in. That is precisely what coal companies are doing to eastern Kentucky.

This is the sound of men moving mountains. But moving mountains may not impress the citizens of Pikeville, who nearly 20 years ago relocated their river to spare eastern Kentucky's commercial and banking capital from nearly annual flooding. So what's a mere mountain? This mountain or former mountain is within the city limits, but it's a massive industrial site. It's hundreds of acres -- dirt, and rock, and coal. The scenes of coal are visible in the face of the exposed high wall directly in front of me across the deep ravine. There is blasting today, and coal extraction, and grading, and leveling. But the most continuous activity today is the constant movement of trucks from somewhere behind me to the edge of the earth on which I'm standing. The trucks are hauling rock and dirt and dumping it over the side into the hollow below.

I'm 1,250 feet high, I assume I'm standing on the mountain that used to be. I learned later that I was standing not on the mountain, but on the hollow fill between mountains. I was standing on 1,250 of rock and dirt that had been taken

off the tops of mountains to get to the coal. This is what the coal industry calls the over burden, which also includes the forest trees that used to be the mountain's best feature. I see no piles of trees. The mining company may have harvested the trees, but more than likely they were burned or they're buried far below me. Most mining companies are so anxious to get to the coal that they don't bother to sell the timber. There are no regulations pertaining to the trees, but there are regulations about what should be done with the topsoil. Bill Caylor is president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Caylor: The coal mining, they will scrape as much as they can to salvage the topsoil. Then they're required to come in and bulldoze and put into piles what topsoil they can get prior to mining. And then at the end of mining they'll take that topsoil and redistribute it. But most of the topsoil is man created topsoil. It's called a topsoil substitute, and they'll use whatever materials they can to create that.

Bob Edwards: How often is the topsoil put back?

Bill Caylor: Well, it's required to be segregated and put back. There is just not that much topsoil to begin with. So we have to recreate topsoil on these mountaintop jobs.

Bob Edwards: Author Eric Reese spent two years wandering around mountaintop removal sites for his book, Lost Mountain.

Eric Reese: They are supposed to save the topsoil, and if you look at a permit map they will show you on8 the permit where they're going to keep the topsoil. And when I went up to Lost Mountain, I asked the guy who's in charge of the job where the topsoil was, and he said, we got a variant not to keep the topsoil. And they just hand those out like coupons.

Bob Edwards: Variants are waivers granted to coal companies by federal and state agencies so that the companies won't have to comply with regulations. Companies can get variants exempting from having to save topsoil. They can also get variants allowing them to destroy streams of water. Jack Spadero is a retired federal mine inspector who served under eight presidents.

Jack Spadero: The valley fills are in violation of federal law because they're covering up intermittent and perennial streams, and that's in violation of the buffer zone rule that's still in effect, although the Bush Administration is trying to change it. It forbids mining within 100 feet of an intermittent or perennial stream.

So those operations simply aren't complying with federal standards, and the states are not enforcing the federal standards. And the oversight by the Bush Administration

through the Office of Surface Mining is almost nonexistent. It's simply there aren't any enforcement actions at the federal level in a substantive way at all right now.

Bob Edwards: It's the Corps of Engineers which allows this building of the streams.

Jack Spadero: That's right. There's a requirement under the Clean Water Act that the Corps of Engineers be allowed to review the designs of these fills. Some of these fills are massive. There might be five or 600 million cubic yards of material. They're the largest earth structures east of the Mississippi River. They might be five to six miles long, and they might fill, well all together they've filled about 2,000 miles of streams in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia. So the Corps is actually in violation of federal law by issuing these permits, and that's been proven in court time and time again.

Bob Edwards: Why are they doing this? What's driving them? What's their motivation?

Jack Spadero: Their motivation is the political pressure that's put on them by powerful people in Washington, in the Administration, and in Congress to continue issuing permits that allow this mining to continue. But they have streamlined that process, and they still continue to approve valley fills saying there's no significant impact. How could there not be

a significant impact if you fill in five or six miles of stream with one valley fill? It's impossible, and the federal courts have said that. When you obliterate the stream, you've created an impact.

Bob Edwards: Bill Caylor of the Kentucky Coal Association says what's being buried aren't streams at all.

Bill Caylor: Bob, I know when I was a kid I would go down, I lived in Somerset, a small town, and I'd go to one of my aunt's, and we'd go out behind her house and play in a little stream. Of course, that stream was running with water in the summer. What we're talking about are these channels that don't have any water in it. They'll have water in it when it rains. It's a ditch. Each of the streams, the environmental activists are telling everybody that we're burying with waste --

Bob Edwards: Well, not the activists, the EPA. The EPA says 700 miles of stream.

Bill Caylor: Yeah, but they're not --

Bob Edwards: And that's two years ago.

Bill Caylor: Yeah, but these streams are the more perennial streams. They're not the ditches. Now I don't know how to make people understand that. The environmental activists say that these are head water streams. Well, they're dry ditches that the head waters of streams in a

sense, but they're in no stretch of the imagination a natural stream, at least a stream that I grew up believing what a stream is.

Bob Edwards: But it's the EPA's figures, not the activists.

Bill Caylor: Well, it's the EPA's definition. What you don't realize is that the definition of stream has changed legally over the last 30 years. Thirty years ago these would not be defined as a stream, a jurisdiction of water of EPA or the Corps of Engineers. Through litigation, the definition of a stream has changed from a free flowing body of water to this ditch.

Bob Edwards: Back at the mining site in Pikeville, I learned that a mountain stream, not a dry ditch, used to run under the massive pile of debris on which I'm standing. It's called Long Branch, and a couple of miles of it are now buried 1,250 feet beneath all this rock and dirt. I asked Bill Caylor to explain.

If you can't mine within 100 feet of a stream, why was I standing on fill over a stream?

Bill Caylor: Because they probably applied for an exemption to the buffer zone rule. The buffer zone rule is not spelled out in the federal law, and probably what you're referring to that was an exemption that was applied for by the

coal company and received that allowed them to encroach into this buffer zone.

Bob Edwards: The mining company says it will route the stream around this site. Maybe it will. After all, this is the town that rerouted a river. In the meantime, the people of Pikeville are wondering what's to become of this site once the mining is done and the flattened earth is declared ready for development.

Transforming a one time mountain into a place for another use is called reclamation. It's required by law. Most have not been developed beyond man made pasture land of non-native grasses planted on soil substitutes. But a few have been turned into sites for Wal-Mart's, golf courses, airports, an occasional upscale housing development.

David Sanders: My name is David Sanders, and I'm a professional engineer and work with a consulting engineering firm, Summit Engineering, that's located in Pikeville, Kentucky. This is called Chloe Ridge. It's a reclaimed mine site that was, been reclaimed about five or six years, and the owners realized as part of the mining that they wanted to develop an access road up to the mountaintop and develop a subdivision. And so we're going to, he's looking at a reclaimed mine site with a subdivision constructed on it.

Bob Edwards: Just three miles from the active mining site I visited in Pikeville is this reclaimed site. The road to Chloe Ridge is lined with signs promising luxury living with lots priced at \$37,500. It's moving day at one fancy home that has a brick driveway, a high iron fence, a swimming pool, and extensive landscaping.

Bob Edwards: Yeah. Back where we come from, these would be million dollar homes.

Dave Sanders: Probably pretty close to that in this area, too, these particular homes. And very few lots left developable. Most of them have been sold, but there are a few lots that are mined and sold.

Bob Edwards: So there have been no sinking problems?

Dave Sanders: Not at this particular site, and they've not been any that we've been aware of.

Bob Edwards: There have been sinking problems on other former mountaintop removal sites. The most notorious case is the Big Sandy Prison in Inez, Kentucky. The prison was built on a donated mountaintop removal site. It's the most expensive federal prison ever built, \$60 million over the original bid because of problems with the land. The prison was nicknamed Sink-Sink after the foundation failed.

Eric Reese: Did you see the golf course?

Bob Edwards: Author Eric Reese.

Eric Reese: They built this supposedly great golf course down there, which I find sort of interesting because nobody down there plays golf except our attorney general, who lives near the course I guess.

Bob Edwards: Shopping malls. There's a Wal-Mart. There's a prison.

Eric Reese: Right. Wal-Mart actually had a lot of problems because the high wall behind it is unstable. The Holiday Inn that was built on a former mountaintop removal mine site, the back half of it has fallen off because of subsidence. So there's a lot of problems with just the stability itself of these sites. But even given that, sure, there's strip malls, there's Wal-Marts on some of these sites. But 99 percent of them are simply sitting there barren.

Bill Caylor: Of course they're barren.

Bob Edwards: Bill Caylor is president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Caylor: You can't build it and they will come. Is it the coal industry's responsibility philosophically to not just create the level land, but to build a factory and then ensure that somebody comes to the factor to work? We can't do that. When you create it, that doesn't mean it's going to be used tomorrow, but that does mean it will be used, and I'll guarantee you it will be used. You've got to have a vision.

You've got to be able to look in the future. People desperately need level land in east Kentucky.

Jack Spadero: I would say Bill Caylor is lying, and the industry is lying, and they have been for a long time.

Bob Edwards: Jack Spadero.

Jack Spadero: There's plenty of land already available from past mountaintop removal operations. If one wants to get into development, there's already plenty to use. We don't need more waste land, grass waste land.

Eric Reese: Most of this land is extremely remote. There's no water source there. There's no topsoil. It's barren rock. And that's not at all attractive to a developer. I mean, this is an absolutely ludicrous position that these moonscapes are in some way improving the land of eastern Kentucky. It's utter nonsense. If you've flown over and seen how bad this looks, how lifeless, how toxic it is, there's no way you could make that claim unless you're just utterly blind or being paid large sums of money to say that.

Jack Taylor: I would argue, now I don't have facts to base this on, but I would argue that they're creating the level land that's being used to create a diverse economy to sustain more growth. For example, around Hazard you'll see more of this type of mining than you will see in some other

areas. You'll also notice that Hazard is a very booming little city.

Eric Reese: Well, it's a boom town in the sense that most people make seven dollars at Wal-Mart or Taco Bell, if that's a boom town. If that's a booming economy, that's what Hazard has. It's got all of these fast food joints and American franchise on these mine sites. What's interesting about Hazard is if you drive through downtown Hazard, it's a complete ghost town. The shops are empty. They're burnt down. It's hideous. Everything's kind of moved out to the strip mines. And downtown is just this empty shell of a town.

Bob Edwards: The aptly named town of Hazard does have a small airport built on a reclaimed mountaintop removal site. Inside the front entrance, a cardboard sign resting against a wall bears a not too subtle reminder of the airport's benefactor. It declares, "Progress through mining."

Male Voice: Wendell H. Ford Airport. Automated weather observation, 205, niner, zulu.

Bob Edwards: I'm going up in a small plane to get an aerial view of mountaintop removal and see if it matches the descriptions I've heard -- moonscape, atomic bomb site, autopsy. In this case, with Mother Earth it's cadaver.

This is one continuous site here?

Male Voice: Yes, it is. Thousands and thousands of acres.

Bob Edwards: From the air, Harry County shows two faces -- unmined areas and forest green, mined areas in pallid gray. Below me are dozens of mesas of varying sizes, some former mountains and some piles of mountaintop that have been blasted away and pushed into the hollows. Most prominent is a wall, hundreds of yards long, and 100, maybe 200 feet high. It's the hacked away side of a mountain with all of its many ancient layers of rock, seams of coal exposed to the open air. A slide photo of the sheer wall that I'm saying would make an excellent visual aide for a geometry class. But here it is in nature stripped of its covering, revealing secrets it's held for nearly 300 million years.

I see a giant lake filled with what looks like tar. It's set perilously above a public road at the edge of the site. It's a slurried pond. Slurry ponds contain the liquid waste from the coal cleaning process. The slurry can develop into a deadly and dangerous mass of black industrial sludge. The ooze is contained behind earthen dams. What happens when the dam breaks when "Exploding Heritage" continues.

Male Voice: Okay, the wind's picking up. I think it might be time to head back.

[BREAK].

Bob Edwards: Mountaintop removal has turned ordinary citizens into activists. They've had help organizing from a group called Kentuckians For The Commonwealth. A few times a year Kentuckians For The Commonwealth also takes Kentucky writers on a tour of areas most devastated by mountaintop removal. The idea is that the writers will be moved to write about what they see and here, exposing the problem to a wider audience.

Male Voice: And we want to keep our comments, each of you keep them to five or seven minutes because I think we have --

Bob Edwards: It's the end of a long day of touring mining sites, and the writers are now gathered in Hineman, Kentucky to hear testimony from Appalachian residents directly affected by mountaintop removal. The writers sit like a panel of judges at the front of the room. Each speaker faces them, coming one by one to share their stories.

Male Voice: Hello. My name is Archie Fields. I was born in Lechard County. And I guess where I'll start at is the time I started going in the mountains, it's always been a wilderness, a beautiful place. And then you go up there now and it looks like an atomic bomb just hit the top of the mountain and leveled all the trees down to the earth.

Female Voice: Respect. Respect for the land that God made and allows us to live on. And I'm sure when He looks down from Heaven, I don't think He's very proud of the way that man is destroying the earth.

Male Voice: So I think at some point we have to decide I'm not willing to make a good living if it means that somebody else's house is going to be flooded. There is a price that is paid, and it's a very big price that's paid for these good paying, short term jobs.

Female Voice: And I'm here to tell you there's no such thing as clean coal. I don't care how many billboards they put it on. We live in dirt, dust.

Male Voice: Ten years down the road, this company will be gone. There won't be no mountain. There won't be no checks. To see your heritage, and your grandchildren's heritage, and everybody from now until eternity's heritage go away overnight because of greed, I don't know what to tell you except that anybody that loves these mountains the way I love them would just about bear arms against these coal companies.

[APPLAUSE].

Bill Caylor: What we're fighting more than anything else is the emotional aspect of it. And facts will not trump emotion.

Bob Edwards: Bill Caylor is president of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Caylor: Coal mining, if you tend to live near it, it can be a nuisance, no different if you live next to a factory. But it's more of a temporary, maybe three, five, seven years, which is a lifetime to a lot of people. But we are a nuisance industry.

Bob Edwards: Mining operations can be a nuisance, but coal field residents also know they can be fatal. At 8 o'clock on the morning of February 26th, 1972, three earthen dams gave way high above Buffalo Creek in Logan County, West Virginia. The dams held gobs of coal waste. When the dams collapsed, they sent 132 million gallons of black waste water gushing down Buffalo Creek Hollow. In just minutes, 125 people were dead and 17 towns were destroyed, leaving 4,000 people homeless. The Pittston Coal Company said it was not the company's fault; it was an act of God. Jack Spadero went there as a young mine safety inspector.

Jack Spadero: Well, we'll have to go through the records, going back all the way until the 1950s, and people in the community were concerned that something was going to happen because they knew the dams weren't being built safely, and there was a lot of water being stored behind them. And there were studies done by various government agencies, at

least four or five government agencies did studies of the dam, that very dam and said, yeah, there's something really bad wrong here, but no one did anything. There were agencies that could have done something and they didn't.

Bob Edwards: Nearly 30 years later, Spadero investigated a much bigger, though non-fatal spill, and episode that would end his government career. It happened nearly six years ago in Martin County, Kentucky. The Environmental Protection Agency called it the worst man made environmental disaster east of the Mississippi, but most people who lived outside the region have never heard about it.

Mick McCoy: We're talking about a flood of 306 to 350 million gallons of toxic waste, emptying into people's yards, emptying into our creeks, emptying into our rivers, and eventually our reservoir. This was 30 times greater than the Exxon Valdez and didn't even get on the damn scroll of sea in the end. Now, what the hell's wrong with that picture? I'm Mick McCoy. I'm a teacher. I was born and raised in Inez. And, hell, I reckon I'll die here.

Bob Edwards: Ironically, Mick McCoy was enjoying the local harvest festival when he first heard something was wrong with the creek.

Mick McCoy: I had grown up knowing about black water. My dad was a game warden for 23 years in this county. And

black water is when there's a slurry pond that somehow overflows or leaks into a stream or a river. But the way people were talking, this was like nothing that had ever happened before. At the creek, it was like running black with like a slow, slurry lava. And it definitely would smother any kind of lie in its path.

Bob Edwards: Coal slurry is the byproduct of cleaning coal. It can develop into thick, black mud, a mix of chemicals and coal particles and water that collects in huge impoundments called slurry ponds. In Martin County, a slurry pond sat atop an abandoned underground mine. The floor of the pond was the ceiling of the underground mine. When the mine ceiling collapsed, the coal waste came crashing down into the mine and out the mine openings, flooding a wide area of the county.

Mick McCoy: Well, they call these places slurry ponds. Well, this pond was 72 acres. I don't know about you, but, you know, a pond is something that you let the Boy Scouts in to catch the blue gills because there's too many fish. Seventy-two acres is a damn lake.

Bob Edwards: So it oozed out of the face of the mine.

Mick McCoy: It burst out of the underground passageways and then was oozing down the mountain into the people's yards, into the streams. You see, the Wolf Creek empties into Tug

River, and the Tug River is where we get our water. So that black shit was what we were drinking, Bob.

Bob Edwards: That was tragic. Bill Caylor, head of the Kentucky Coal Association.

Bill Caylor: You have to realize the coal industry doesn't want this, but it wasn't the failure of the dam or the impoundment. What happened is something that we had not paid a whole lot of attention to. It was the ground way back behind the dam that caved in.

Bob Edwards: But the company knew it could happen because it had happened as mine inspector Jack Spadero discovered.

Jack Spadero: I found that six years before the October 2000 failure, that there had been a previous failure and of the same kind where the bottom of the reservoir broke through into old mine workings and caused a considerable amount of damage. But the operator was allowed by the Mine Safety and Health Administration to go back to work that day and resume pumping slurry into that very reservoir.

Bob Edwards: A mining engineer working for the federal government made nine recommendations that would have been prevented another breakthrough. None of his recommendations was implemented. As one of the lead government investigators of the spill, Jack Spadero wanted to cite Martin County Coal

with eight violations, including willful negligence. But then the Bush Administration took office. Charges were reduced, and Spadero refused to sign the government report on the disaster. Under intense pressure to sign the report, Spadero chose to retire from the government. The coal company was fined \$110,000, reduced on appeal to just \$5,500.

Jack Spadero: For the what EPA called the worst environmental disaster in the history of the southeastern United States, \$5,500 fine. That's incredible, isn't it? That's just incredible.

Bob Edwards: Nina McCoy teaches high school in Inez, Kentucky.

Nina McCoy: What we learned hard and fast with our own environmental disaster when we had this 300 plus million gallons of sludge shoved in our face is that we have to take the democracy seriously. A lot of people in this country have come to believe that democracy is an automated machine and that it will run itself. We thought that we were being taken care of. We thought we had an Environmental Protection Agency. Come to find out the coal company had an environmental protection agency.

We thought we had a Center for Disease Control. Come to find out, the coal company had a center for disease control. We knew that we didn't have a congressman or a senator, but we

assumed that somewhere when there was something so massive as what we had that someone would take our part. But we found out that we didn't have any of that. And so I think a lot of the people with mountaintop removal, they think somebody's watching, and nobody is.

Bob Edwards: The coal companies are enjoying Washington's friendly attitude to the energy industry, and they've long had a cozy relationship with state and local officials. But there are exceptions. Carroll Smith is the judge executive for Lechard (phonetic sp.) County, the county's chief elected official.

Carroll Smith: The coal companies learned real early how to keep themselves in power. They had the money. They controlled the local officials. You know, we've never really had a county government for generations. We've always had a county judge, but if you really wanted something you didn't go to the county judge; you went to the coal company, you know, because that's where the real power was. The coal companies decided who was going to be the county judge; therefore, the county judge owed his soul to the coal company, and the real clout and the real power of the government rested with the coal companies.

Also if you complained about the coal companies' practices, then you, or some of your family members, or some

of your friends, were fired from their jobs. And so people learned real quick that if coal company flooded your house, then you said, oh, that's okay. My husband works for you or my brother works for you, so it's okay. We'll clean it up. Don't worry about it.

Bob Edwards: An ex-miner himself, Carroll Smith was able to break through the tradition of corruption, but he only won the election by a few hundred votes. He and his constituents have had problems with floods in areas that traditionally never flooded. With the mountains changing shape, rainwater develops new run off patterns, flooding homes that never had a problem before.

Carroll Smith: If this was happening in Lexington or Louisville, then people would revolt. But it happens here, and the people said, well, just one of them things, you know. That's part of it. It's like an abused spouse or something, you know. You take your whipping every week and go on.

Bob Edwards: I don't think many people know about this, you know? They know about plans to drill for oil in the national wildlife refuge and get very upset about that. And Appalachia doesn't seem to have friends.

Carroll Smith: Well, a lot of times we are our own worst enemies, you know? We allow ourselves to be taken advantage of. We've always had absentee ownership, absentee government.

We've always allowed somebody else to provide for us, to provide our job, to provide whatever. And a lot of people are waiting on some, you know, from Toyota or Ford Motor Company to build a plant or somebody to come in and save us. But the truth about it is we have to save ourselves. Nobody's going to save us. We have to do it ourselves, and we have to decide, you know, this is enough, you know. We're going to do this, and it's going to be our people protecting our place and our culture, and nobody else is going to help us.

Bob Edwards: What would you like to see for your constituents in this whole matter, coal and exploitation of the region?

Carroll Smith: If a company can come in and extract their minerals, not destroy our people, our culture, our environment, do it responsibly, put something back into the community for what they take out. And I think that can be done. You can't do it if you demand that your electricity just be \$50 a month. I mean, you know, the real cost has to go to the consumer at some point. We should be paying our fair share like the rest of the world pays. But I think that if a company can come in and say, okay, we're not going to destroy your water, we're not going to destroy your homes and your roads. We're going to mine coal, but we're going to do it responsibly. And then we can coexist. And then when

they're done, we're not left with a sterile dust bowl or, you know, something that we just can't inhabit.

Bob Edwards: Another lethal hazard plaguing the people of coal country has to do with coal trucks -- their number, their size, their weight, and the recklessness of their drivers. For a long time, coal trucks were allowed to haul overweight and severely overloaded, another price one pays for having coal in the neighborhood.

Patsy Carter: I'm Miss Patsy Carter. Our daughter, Darliss Carter, she was killed with an overweight coal truck. That was in 2000.

Bob Edwards: You and Darliss were very close.

Patsy Carter: Very close. We did a lot together. What we did, we raised chickens, and gathered the eggs for breakfast, and then made the homemade biscuits from scratch. And she wasn't ashamed of her biscuits. But we did a lot together. We'd eat greens and I taught her, you know, what we could eat and what we couldn't. We lived on a farm, and it was a good life. It was really a good life.

Bob Edwards: The driver tried to blame her.

Patsy Carter: The driver tried to blame her. Usually these coal trucks, usually they travel like two or three together. That way if an incident does come up, they can back the story up. And the guy that was in front of this driver

that killed my daughter, his name was Joseph Meadows. And two coal truck drivers. They tried to blame it on her, both of them. They tried to say she fell asleep, which I knew better than that because she always, she was active. She has just called me.

Bob Edwards: Why are they allowed to get away with that?

Patsy Carter: Coal. Coal. King Coal. I mean, you look around in the United States and freight miners, you know. They haul pickles, and paper towels, and all of what we need, our necessities. But if they're overweight, then they're in big trouble. Big trouble. But in Kentucky and West Virginia, it's just like we're on the tail end of the earth, you know. We're trying to get awareness out on what's going on in Kentucky and West Virginia in the mining industry because it is, it's all wrong, you know. I feel like a second class citizen.

Bob Edwards: Patsy Carter, whose daughter was killed by a coal truck 11 days before her graduation from college. The conclusion of "Exploding Heritage" after this break.

[BREAK].

Bob Sloan: I care about mountains deeply.

Bob Edwards: Writer Bob Sloane.

Bob Sloan: I've believed for a long time that if you live somewhere where you can only see about a quarter mile --

that's as far as you're going to see -- that it impacts your character. It forms your character. You become invested in what you see, perhaps more strongly than in other places, because you can't look that far away. Things are very immediate. I care about mountains deeply.

Bob Edwards: Respect and even reverence for the land are a part of American Indian culture and tradition. The Dali Lama has written of the Tibetan Buddhist sense of responsibility to nature. In Japan there is a festival twice a year, in the spring and the fall, that is held specifically to praise mountains. In the United States we don't praise mountains; we blow them up.

Tom Barnes: I'm Tom Barnes. I'm extension professor in the Department of Forestry at the University of Kentucky. We are on the top of Pine Mountain in Lechard County, just south of Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Bob Edwards: What grows here?

Tom Barnes: The forest that we're in is called the mixed mesophytic (phonetic sp.) forest. There's a very famous forest ecologist by the name of E. Lucy Braun, and she wrote a book called The Deciduous Forest of North America. She described these forests, and these are one of the most floristically diverse forests in all of North America, unrivaled in terms of plant species diversity. Just standing

right here you're looking at, on the top you're looking at chestnut oak, sugar maple, black oak, scarlet oak. You'll see sassafras in the understory. There's some elm coming up. Historically there were chestnuts here. In these forests you can see probably in an acre 20 or 30 different species of trees.

These forests are very complex. There's a lot of plant species diversity. There's great animal species diversity. And, of course, when you replace that with either a grassland monoculture or a tree farm, you don't recreate the kinds of conditions that you had originally. You can't do that.

Bob Edwards: A forest can't develop on a reclaimed coal mine?

Tom Barnes: Not in my lifetime. Not in your lifetime. Not in my children's lifetime. Maybe not even in their children's lifetime. These forests are old. These are unglaciated forests. It took tens of thousands of years for these things to develop.

Bob Edwards: It's a trade off, right? Dense forests.

Tom Barnes: Well, it depends on what you value in life. I mean, how many Wal-Mart's do we need? How many more shopping centers do we need? I mean, once this forest is gone, it will take another Heaven and another earth for it to be replaced. Once it's gone, it's gone forever.

You know, it's really interesting. One of the things that I've been thinking about and doing a lot of reading lately has been on kind of the morality of kind of this, what we call the environmental crisis, and it's related to all of this. And God gave us the world to be stewards of, to care about. And is that what the Creator wanted, to blow the tops off of mountains so we can have cheap electricity? I mean, where is the morality in that?

Bob Edwards: Henry David Thoreau, perhaps the American writer most often quoted on nature, climbed an Appalachian mountain or two in Maine. Then he wrote, "The tops of the mountains are among the unfinished parts of the globe, whether it is a slight insult to the gods to climb and pry into their secrets and try their affect on our humanity. Only daring and insolent men perchance go there." Very close by Thoreau in Concord, Massachusetts is another great writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote, "Mountains are earth's undecaying monuments." Hawthorne was wrong and Thoreau was right. The tops of the mountains were unfinished until now when they're being finished off.

Our present day Thoreau is writer Wendell Berry.

Wendell Berry: Well, I was raised by, among others, a father who thought a grass pasture was the finest human artifact; that it was a wonderful thing, that it was

productive, it was protective of the land. It was beautiful. And to him to have violated the capacity of that land to produce that pasture would have been a desecration. And so when I first saw strip mining 40 some years ago now, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that grown up responsible people would do a thing like that. And I'm having trouble believing it still, although it's persisted for long and grown much worse.

Patty Ambergy: We all should come as one voice. I think it's time for a revolution. I think it's time to raise hell.

Bob Edwards: Patty Amberthy lives in Lechard County, Kentucky.

Patty Ambergy: These mountains are our children's heritage. Some of them laugh and says it's not. Our heritage is our mountains. To me, mountaintop removal is like a thief in the night. When the thief comes to your house and robs you, most of the time you can replace those things. And when a mountaintop removal comes into your community, you can never replace that as long as this earth stands.

Wendell Berry: What does it mean to love a place that's completely destroyed? That, it seems to me, is a unique suffering.

Bob Edwards: Isn't there a natural heritage when you're born and you get -- some oceans, the mountains, some rivers?

Wendell Berry: You get it and your children get it, and it belongs never to you and never to them. But it belongs always in human terms to whoever's yet to come. And to fail to protect it for whoever's yet to come is a grievous fault. I don't think the word "sin" is too strong a word for it. It's a terrible sin to destroy a gift that you could not make or replace yourself, that is not given to you except in trust for those who are still to come.

Bob Edwards: The effort to protect Appalachian heritage is a solitary endeavor. Support for mountaintop removal coal mining is bipartisan. It has the blessing of both political parties, multiple state and federal agencies, both houses of Congress, and the federal courts. None of the major environmental groups -- the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Natural Resources Defense Council -- none of them includes the end of mountaintop removal coal mining among its major goals. Those people in central Appalachia who oppose the radical alteration of their portion of the Appalachian mountains stand alone. Meanwhile the hauling of coal from eastern Kentucky continues around the clock, off to the power plants that keep our homes and businesses operating.

The consumer measures the cost of energy in dollars and cents on a monthly bill. The power plant and utility companies measure the cost in dollars per ton of coal. But

back at the source of that coal is the cost that is, as Wendell Berry says, incalculable -- the cost of a 300-million-year-old mountain.

The Bob Edward Show is produced by Tish Dalton (phonetic sp.), Chad Campbell, Andy Daniel, Phil Harrell, Steve Lichtein (phonetic sp.), Ed McNulty, Jeffrey Ruddick, Jim Rosenberg, Shelley Tillman, and Sam Wright. Our e-mail address is bob@XMradio.com. Monday, political analysis by David Broder of the Washington Post.

Thanks for listening. Have a great weekend. This is XMPR, channel 133.

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