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Advocating for the mountains, and people, of Appalachia

Tom Roberts | Aug. 3, 2009 NCR Today

Appalachia is one of America?s great paradoxes, a region of breathtaking beauty and grinding poverty, coal its blessing and curse. It is also a region easily hidden away among the culture?s pressing problems.

But today, it will be remembered in the nation?s capital by an interfaith delegation noting the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, a piece of legislation intended to curtail the natural devastation caused by strip mining.

The act contained significant loopholes large enough to permit what has become known as mountaintop removal mining, a process that actually removes the tops of mountains (500 and counting over the past three decades) making the coal buried deep in the mountains easier to extract.

According to Jordan Blevins of the National Council of Churches, which is hosting today?s 7 p.m. candlelight vigil in Lafayette Park across from the White House, ?More than seven percent of Appalachian hardwood forests, nearly 1.2 million acres, have been clear-cut and burned, and more than 1,200 miles of Appalachian headwater streams, which are connected to all major waters in the Southern U.S., have been buried or polluted with toxic mining waste between 1985 and 2001, while sludge dams represent the greatest threat to nearby communities, contaminating many drinking water supplies.?

The areas affected range through the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

More information can be found on the National Council of Churches of Christ website, ncccusa.org.

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