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Appalachian Emissaries Visit Gainesville on Eve of Mountaintop Removal Vote

Gainesville, FL—September 16-18, 2014—Gainesville Loves Mountains' multi-year campaign to permanently end Gainesville Regional Utilities' (GRU) use of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal is finally coming to a head.

During the September 18th evening meeting of the Gainesville City Commission, Commissioners will vote on a coal policy for GRU that seeks to exclude coal mined using MTR. In April, the Commission voted unanimously in condemnation of MTR and five of seven Commissioners asked GRU and the City Attorney to draft the policy recommended by Commissioner Lauren Poe.

On the eve of this month's vote, two Appalachian anti-MTR activists will visit Gainesville to speak to Commissioners, GRU, and the public on this topic. Dr. Matt Wasson has worked with the organization Appalachian Voices since 2001 and has studied all aspects of the “coal cycle” — from mining, transportation and combustion of coal to the disposal of power plant waste. A nationally recognized authority on MTR coal mining and coal economics, Dr. Wasson has testified before Congress, appears frequently on expert panels, and is a contributor to high-profile media outlets including Huffington Post, Grist, and Daily Kos. Dr. Wasson will be accompanied by Ann League, Tennessee Campaign Coordinator for Appalachian Voices. Ms. League became involved in the campaign to end MTR mining when the 2,200-acre Zeb Mountain mine was permitted near her home in Campbell County, TN.

“We've spoken with hundreds of citizens on this issue, and have gathered more than 1,500 petition signatures on this topic. We've also heard from our friends in Appalachia for years now that this practice, perpetuated by coal purchasers like GRU, is depriving them of even basic necessities such as clean drinking water. It's past time for Gainesville to end its relationship with mountaintop removal coal mining, and Commissioner Poe's proposed policy gets us there without negatively affecting GRU ratepayers” said Jason Fults, co-founder of Gainesville Loves Mountains.

Dr Wasson commended the Gainesville community for being so forward-thinking on this issue: “Mountaintop removal coal mining tears apart communities, poisons water, pollutes the air and destroys the natural heritage of Appalachia - and worst of all, it's completely unnecessary. Communities like Gainesville that have long been consumers of mountaintop removal coal have a unique opportunity to help move Appalachia forward through their fuel purchasing decisions. We look forward to speaking with the City Commissioners about how they can protect both electricity consumers in Gainesville and communities in Appalachia that live with the devastating consequences of mountaintop removal.”

In order for Poe's motion to be successful, he'll need the support of at least three other Commissioners. According to Commissioner Poe, “GRU's overall coal consumption has been falling significantly in recent months, and we've already begun the transition away from Appalachian mountaintop removal coal. I think we have a proposed solution to this issue that addresses everyone's concerns, from the social and environmental implications of our fuel choices to the impact of those choices on our customers' utility rates.”

Gainesville Loves Mountains is committed to minimizing the impacts of coal consumption and extraction on Appalachia. In addition to our work to end mountaintop removal, GLM is currently pursuing local policies that will help our community achieve significant energy savings while also strengthening our economy.

Mountaintop removal (MTR) is a highly destructive form of coal mining that removes hundreds of vertical feet of a mountain using heavy explosives in order to access the thin seams of coal underneath. MTR has a devastating impact on the economy, ecology, and communities of Appalachia. To date, more than 500 mountains have been leveled, and nearly 2,000 miles of precious Appalachian headwater streams have been buried and polluted by MTR. To learn more about MTR, visit:
<http://ilovemountains.org/>.

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