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Welcome to Appalachia

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Welcome to Appalachia

The Appalachian region includes 420 counties in 13 states- Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The Appalachian Region
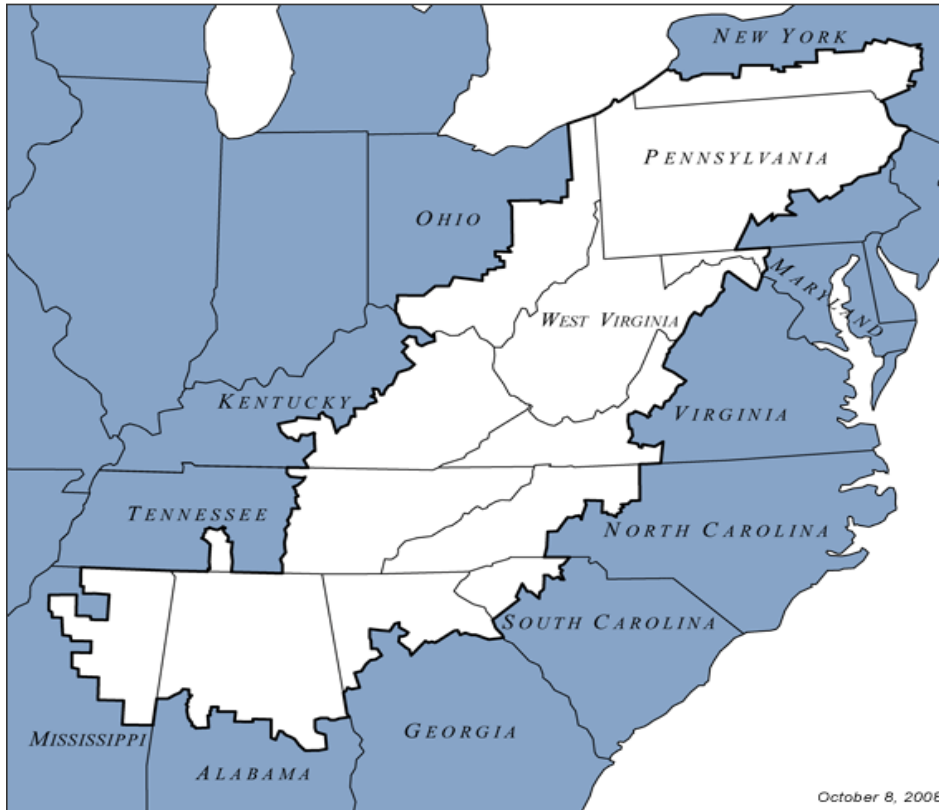
Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

Brief History of the Appalachian Region

- 1500's: The Iroquois Confederacy was in control of the northern part of the Appalachian Region. In 1570 The Five Nations of the Iroquois was formed, uniting the tribes of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. These five nations, which had been fighting each other, became extremely powerful as a united force.

The Cherokee Nation dominated the southern section of Appalachia until about 1780, and they still have a large tribal population of about 18,000 members.

- 1540: Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto and his group of about 700 men arrived in Southern Appalachia. They were searching for gold, but instead found many established Native American cities to fight with.

- 1650: English fur traders explored the Appalachian area, encouraged by the great demand for fur in Europe. In the late 1600's, the fur trade grew into a beneficial business for both the European traders and the Native Americans in the area.

  English settlers began to populate the Appalachians. The English government deported "undesirable" people, like orphans and criminals to the New World. They were sent to the U.S. as servants rather than letting them be a burden on English society. There were also many indentured servants from England and Germany in the Appalachian region.

- 1715: Scots-Irish people began migrating to Southern Appalachia. They originally planned to settle in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, but had little in common with the Quaker and German population that was already settled there. The traditional speech patterns of Appalachia are based around a Scots-Irish base. The form of English spoken in the Appalachians today is one the most ancient forms of the language that is still being used.

- 1838 A.D.: 16,000 Cherokees were forced out of their homes by the U.S. Army and marched the "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma. The inaccessible valleys of Appalachia provided hiding places for many Cherokees and they were able to escape the exodus.

- 1900: Coal Industry was formed, and companies created new towns to support the mines in isolated rural areas. These towns were often very oppressive because the company controlled every aspect of community life.

- 1930's: The Great Depression caused people to turn away from failing industrial jobs and back to self sufficient family farms. Consequently, the isolated farmers of the Appalachian area were not hit as hard as the rest of the country.

- 1950's: New coal mining technology rendered many jobs obsolete and created massive unemployment in Appalachia.

- 1965: The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is formed by Congress to alleviate poverty by strengthening the economic infrastructure of the area. They built roads to isolated areas and encouraged developmental projects that would provide increased employment.

Environment of the Appalachian Region

Coal mining, mountain top removal, and deforestation are prevalent in the Appalachian region. Because of this, these industries are focused on in relation to laws concerning the health and well-being of the workers and communities that are directly affected by the resources being drained from the area. The need to focus on these aspects of the Appalachian environment is important to preserve the earth and the people making their home in this section of the United States. It is important to ascertain how the globalizations of environmental processes affect the health and well being through an examination of the soil, water, air and health of the communities of Appalachia. Also, another way environmental factors affect the information infrastructure would be access to health care information because of poor road conditions or lack of main routes.

Three Processes Relating to Environmental Globalization of Appalachia

Deforestation

Appalachia's environment is shaped by the diverse region of hardwood forests, which contain the most varied supply of timber types in the United States. Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers, Inc (2009) observe that because of the climate of the forest which endures hot summers and cold winters, the trees grow gradually, resulting in superior strength and durability (n.p.). The forests of the Appalachian region, millions of acres, are subject to deforestation related to timber harvest, as Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers, Inc (2009) state, to supply "Appalachian oaks, cherry, maple, poplar, ash, beech, basswood, birch, hickory and walnut" (n.p.). These forests supply timber globally to buyers needing to make cabinets, gun stocks, furniture, and many other items out of this superior wood.

Strip Mining

Strip mining is the process where coal is extracted from the tops and sides of the Appalachian Mountains, resulting in literally a strip of land being cleared of trees. For miles, one can see bare sides of mountains where trees cannot grow back.

Mountain top removal is a form of strip mining in which explosives are used to strip trees from the soil and create holes in the tops of mountains to get to the coal. The remains of the mountain top are then thrown into a valley, destroying streams located in the valley. As the New York Post (2008) reports, "1,200 miles of Appalachian streams have been buried this way and hundreds of square miles of forests damaged" (n.p.). The result of this process is coal, which the Appalachian region supplies to companies throughout the United States and globally, and in the process, destroying the beauty of the natural landscape.

Photo courtesy of http://www.ohiocitizen.org/campaigns/coal/coal.html

Coal Mining

     Coal mining, or underground mining, is another form of environmental concern for the Appalachian region because while the tops of mountains are left intact, a hole is left in the mountain from miners and machinery. After the harvested coal is cleaned the remaining sludge is either piped into abandoned underground mines, ruining the natural underground supply of drinking water streams, or dumped into slurry ponds. When the dams of these ponds collapse, whole communities can be destroyed. See Sidebar for videos concerning the Buffalo Creek flood disaster of 1972. Collapsing of the abandoned mines is another concern for communities.

Environmental Issues from These Processes

 Water Contamination

Water contamination is one feature that creates disastrous effects for the people of the Appalachian region. As explained above, mountain top removal creates waste that is dumped into valleys, causing the streams that feed into the communities of Appalachia to be contaminated with heavy metals. These metals are then carried into homes as drinking water and also leech into the ground as contaminants in food producing.

Because of this, The Alliance for Appalachia (2009) observed the Clean Water Protection Act was first introduced in 2002 to Congress because of a change to the long standing definition of what fill material was. This change allows coal companies to dump the waste into streams that feed into major rivers (n.p.). As of March 2009, the Clean Water Protection Act was reintroduced to Congress in the hope that it would serve to, as The Alliance for Appalachia (2009) reports, help "protect communities and water quality by outlawing the dumping of mining waste into streams" (n.p.). This protection would mean coal companies could no longer deposit waste materials into the streams of the Appalachian region. Having clean water to drink should be a basic right in America but many people in Appalachia feel they do not have clean water and believe they are getting sick from the heavy metals that are being fed into the streams.

Air Pollution

Air pollution is another environmental issue related to the three processes mentioned above. According to the Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment (2009), in the state of West Virginia, American Electric Power's John E. Amos Plant burns coal to produce electricity. It produces the most pollutants of any other factory, and it provides 15 million tons of pollution per year (n.p.).

High levels of mercury are also prevalent because these coal burning power plants release this chemical through the smoke stacks, which in turn are deposited into streams. With this depositing, fish are contaminated, creating yet another food source to be questioned by the communities of the Appalachian region. As the Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment (2009) reports,

> Sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and mercury emissions from West Virginia's power plants are responsible for poor air quality and impaired health of the people of Appalachia and New England. For the last twenty years, West Virginia's air regulatory program has enforced the state and federal Clean Air Act with virtually no citizen monitoring. These unchecked emissions have contributed to global warming, because of the weak pollution limits secured by industry-friendly consultants (n.p.).

Coal mining also pollutes the air. Methane gas buildup is a natural occurrence in coal beds resulting from plant materials decaying to form peat, which then, over time, produces either the coal or the methane. Because of the volatile nature of this gas, mines have been required to circulate the air to avoid explosions, creating air pollution. As Davis (2003) suggests, "coal mining companies should be required to degasify …rather than ventilate the methane and pollute the atmosphere" (p. 35).   Degasification is a process by which methane is captured and then sold by the coal companies for a profit to other companies, within the United States or internationally, who benefit from the destruction of the communities of the Appalachian region.

Erosion

The Appalachian mountain ranges are plagued by soil erosion due to deforestation and strip mining. Because of these processes, many communities are enduring floods in the valleys,

causing the streams to disappear, and take food supplies, such as fish, with them. Their homes and roads are in danger of becoming flooded. As Fritsch and Gallimore (2007) discuss, "The land is prone to severe flooding because of the removal of the sponge of the forest cushion, landslides, drops in the water table, the fracturing of aquifers, major erosion, and siltation of streams and rivers" (p. 207) due to strip mining and logging practices.

To combat erosion due to the logging industry the United States Department of Agriculture introduced the multiflora rose, brought over from Asia, and kudzu, brought over from Japan in the 1880s. As Fritsch and Gallimore (2007) hypothesize, these were to serve "as a living fence for windbreaks and erosion control" (p. 210). Unfortunately, these plants are very evasive and both have overtaken native plants and are disturbing natural habitats in the Appalachian regions. Other measures to control soil erosion have been to introduce evergreens and other trees that can thrive on rocky and depleted soil, and grape growing, since Appalachia's wild native grapes continue to grow, even on surface mined land.

Health problems

Due to Appalachia's environmental woes, health problems abound in this region, much more so than the rest of the United States. The Appalachia Community Cancer Network (ACCN) (2006) focuses its efforts on ways to reduce the cancer disparities through education about prevention among the Appalachian communities (n.p.). However, despite their efforts, the ACCN (2009) states "lung and colorectal cancers all have high incidence and mortality rates in the seven-state region" of Kentucky, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (n.p.). In looking at the environmental impacts of this region, one can see how water contamination and air pollution contribute to the high incidence rates, not to mention the lung conditions of workers in the mines. Because the information infrastructure of Appalachia is

lacking due to mistrust of outsiders, lack of education, and poverty, it is important for groups like the ACCN to continue to spread the word about the effects industries are having on the people's health.

Socio-economics of the Appalachian Region

Appalachia is a land of contradictions. It is rich in natural resources yet economically poor, it has been and is exploited yet underdeveloped, and the land is scarred yet beautiful. The wealth gained by extractive coal and forest industries has not been returned to the region or the people.

The region is divided into three sub-regions: Northern Appalachia, Central Appalachia, and Southern Appalachia. The sub-region of Central Appalachia with its rugged mountains is the most isolated and has consistently experienced the highest level of economic distress from 1960 to 2000. "The rate of distress in Appalachia, for example, was more than twice that of the non-Appalachian U.S. in 2000, while the rate of distress in Central Appalachia alone is currently approximately four times the national rate" (Wood, 23). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) defines a county distressed if it meets the following criteria:

1. A poverty rate that is 150 percent or more of the U.S. average

2. Per Capita Market Income (PCMI) that is no more than 2/3 of the U.S. average

3. And an unemployment rate that is 150 percent or more of the U.S. average

Map Created: June 2002.
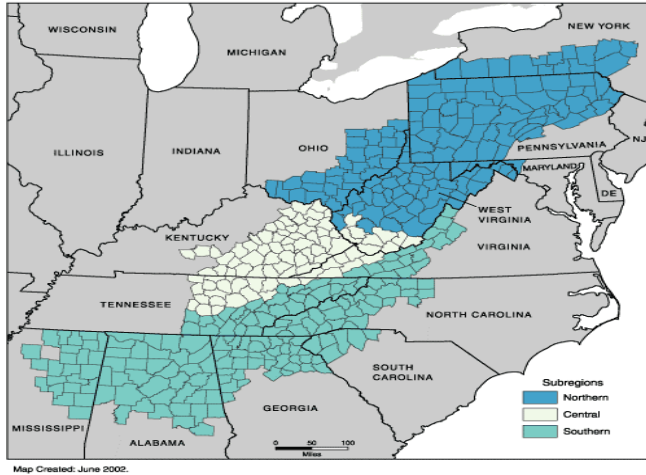
In 2000, there were 242 counties in Appalachia that met the ARC indicator for low PCMI. 146 counties experienced high unemployment and 114 of the counties had a poverty rate meeting the ARC indicator. Clearly, this is a region with a significant number of people living in impoverished conditions (Wood, 29).

- Over 95% percent of the population is white in Appalachia compared to the rest of the country at 79%.

- 58% of the people live in rural areas compared to only 18% of the rest of our country.

- In America, 12.8% of the population is 64 years or older. In Appalachia over 14% is over 64 years of age.

Housing in Appalachia remains the worst in the nation. In Central Appalachia, there are over 30,000 units lacking complete plumbing and 22,000 lacking adequate kitchen facilities. Mobile homes dominate the rural areas at a rate of three times the national rate. Homeownership rates are very high in Appalachia. However, these are homes without running water or indoor plumbing, unsafe wiring, no insulation, crumbling foundations, and unsafe roofs.

Culture of the Appalachian Region

Appalachia is a blend of Native Americans and immigrants from Ireland, Scotland, Germany, and Poland. This blend of cultures has been kept alive by the isolation of the

mountains. This isolation has allowed the people to continue many folkways that have

disappeared in other parts of the country, which works for them and also against them. There is

a rich culture and history of oral and written literature, visual arts, crafts, singing, songwriting,

instrument construction, quilting, and knowledge of herbs that exist in no other part of

America. Yet, the ways of the people has also isolated them from mainstream America

and easily cast them into negative perceptions. It is a region seen by much of America as

backwards and uneducated. A perception played out by Hollywood and the mass media with

movies, such as, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Deliverance*. These mislead perceptions of the

people and their culture does not take away from the facts that they are a people of great

resiliency, sense of community, and strong ties to family and land.

Since the late 60s, high school students in Southern Appalachia have produced Foxfire books

and magazines with interviews of the people of Appalachia preserving the culture and ways of

the people. Foxfire can be accessed at: http://www.foxfire.org.

     The Appalachian Cultural Museum has also preserved items from the past and can be

reached at http://www.museum.appstate.edu.

Technology Infrastructure of the Appalachian Region

There are several notable government actions that have changed the course of the technological infrastructure of the Appalachians. Roosevelt's New Deal provided funding, incentives, and the beginning of the physical infrastructure for industry in the Appalachians, through the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Core. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), created by Congress in 1965, had helped build highways, health clinics, industrial parks, water lines, and other infrastructure necessities (2006, p. 1571).

The ARC 2002 study, which can be found at: http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeid=1226, showed that "Appalachia substantially lacks both adequate access to a robust telecommunications infrastructure and the local capacity to use technology effectively for economic development" (n.d., para. 1). According to the ARC website, technology is essential to the economic growth of the Appalachian area however, even though there is funding available through ARC, according to their survey results:

- Projects were most frequently designed to improve skills training and educational opportunities (87 percent), and to enhance economic development (74 percent).

- Nearly two-thirds of the 70 projects aimed to enhance community development, long-term telecommunications capabilities, and/or the coordination of community-wide information (66 percent for each).

- Forty-two of the 70 projects (60 percent) aimed to improve delivery of and access to government services, and 35 projects (50 percent) aimed to enhance employment opportunities.

These educational endeavors don't necessarily lead to a growth of technological capacity in central Appalachia because wages are not high enough to convince the people who gain marketable skills to stay in the area. After the 2002 report Congress reauthorized the ARC and gave it four areas to concentrate on: increasing entrepreneurial activities with the technology sector, increasing affordable access to broadband services, increasing the use of e-commerce, and providing training and educational opportunities in the area of telecommunications and technology. ARC's online presence provides many tools and resources to help communities learn about and develop telecommunication programs but the majority of people don't have access to this information. The digital divide is a very critical problem.

According to a 2006 report from the ARC, in March and April of 2006, six to eight new business in Maryland, have joined the high-speed wireless network funded by ARC in a county in Maryland, each week. A few of the technology initiatives such as: Appalachia Technologies, LLC, Technology Infrastructure Group, and Meraki, are trying to bring network training and connectivity solutions, including Wi-Fi, to the Appalachian region but while globalization of local industries helps further the need for more technologies and telecommunications services, it does little to raise the standards of living for wage earners being replaced by automation.

Politics of the Appalachian Region

The Appalachian Region has been largely controlled by the coal mining, forestry, and textile industries. Company towns were built by the industries to maintain and control their labor force (Abramson, R., & Haskell, J., 2006). NGO's *Elites,* as they are still referred to today, moved into local government positions or formed relationships with government officials, which allowed them to gain access to natural resources often to the detriment of the local population (Caudill, H.M., 1963).

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was created by Congress in 1965 to help "provide the infrastructure necessary to revive Appalachia's economy" (2006, p. 1567). According to Gordon McKinney, the ARC was used by the Elites to further their own agenda to exploit the indigenous workers and the natural resources and gain money for their own infrastructure projects. ARC designated special funds and partnered with state and federal governments to create policies and distribute funding. "More than 80% of total funding has been allocated to the construction of the thirty-two-hundred-mile Appalachian Development Highway System" (2006, p. 1570). ARC funding has also been utilized to construct vocational and health education facilities, sewage-treatment plants, public housing as well as timber development, mining area restoration, and water resource technical assistance, research, and planning. They have also funded land stabilization and conservation control.

The ARC is a unique government program, in that its power to grant funding and access to projects works very closely with the governors of the nine original states of President Roosevelt's Commission plus those of South Carolina, Ohio, Mississippi, and New York. Every year these governors present a list of projects to the commission. The commission also determines the formula by which the "annual appropriation from Congress is distributed among the states and approves each state's developmental plan (2006, p. 1570).

Despite the efforts of Roosevelt's New Deal, the creation of the National Park System, and Kennedy's War on Poverty, the economic distress in central Appalachia still exists today and "many citizens in all parts of Appalachia view their government as inept or corrupt" (2006, p. 1657).

Information Distribution or Libraries and Appalachia

The information professional in this large spatial unit has lots of opportunities to assist in the Information Transfer Cycle with the organization, dissemination/utilization, diffusion, and preservation processes. Preservation of a culture that is unique and diverse is already well under way. Although the infrastructure for distribution may be poor in the private sector, the governmental, educational and business; including entrepreneurial arena, is well funded and has access to the global information network. In North Carolina there is a library consortium called the Appalachian Regional Library.

The Digital Library of Appalachia can be found at: http://www.aca-dla.org

Outlier: Music

Folk music is as influential and deeply rooted in the Appalachian Mountains as the coal that lies underneath them. Modern technologies are slow to reach the isolated areas of Appalachia and music has always been a portable and accessible form of entertainment. Traditional mountain music is a jumble of influences from the original Appalachian settlers. Scots-Irish immigrants brought fiddle jigs, which mixed with traditional English ballads, African American spirituals, work songs, and swing and jazz influences.


Photo courtesy of www.atwater-donnelly.com

The unique sound of Appalachian music can be attributed to the diverse origins of its key instruments. The most famous is probably the fiddle, an import from Europe. They were practical instruments because they are small, lightweight, and have a loud enough sound to carry

over a group of revelers. Banjos originated in Africa, where the instrument existed in many

variant forms. African Americans from southern plantations brought them to the Appalachian

area, and banjos were added to fiddles to create a unique duo that is the root of mountain folk

music.

Appalachian Dulcimers are an adaptable instrument that grew from Eastern European

predecessors. They are hourglass shaped and played in the lap by strumming, picking, or

plucking. Mail order catalogs provided new possibilities to isolated musicians, and the autoharp

and guitar were purchased and added to the folk music sound.
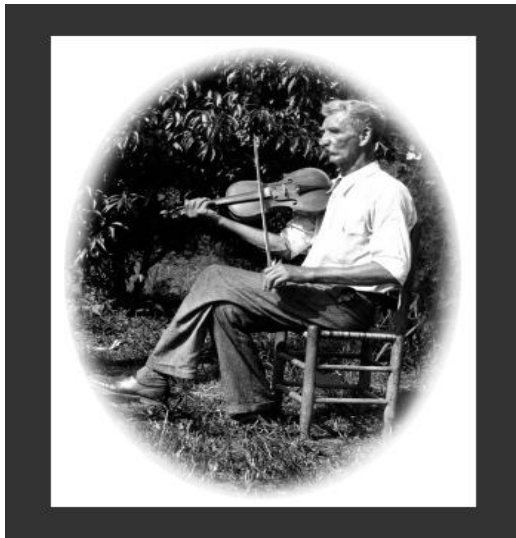
Traditional mountain music has long been passed down through families, but information

professionals are now formally preserving and protecting it for future generations. Folk songs are

collected in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Digital Library of

Appalachia, and many universities have digital collections. These organizations have shared the

rich cultural heritage of the Appalachian area with the world by making the music widely and

easily accessible.

Music has always been a powerful source of strength and comfort for mountain people, but now it is also helping them in a tangible way, which is tourism. There are countless bluegrass music festivals that draw visitors from around the world to the Appalachian area. Here are links to some popular ones:

http://www.appalachianmusic.org/

http://www.appalachianuprising.net/

http://www.appsummer.org/

http://www.afbawindgap.org

http://www.bluegrassomagh.com/

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Appendix A
Other Informative Sources

http://www.ohiocitizen.org/campaigns/coal/coal.html

http://www.arc.gov/index.do?nodeId=1366

http://www.appvoices.org/

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cW9dni4r9y8: This link is a youtube video of local voices

sharing their experiences with mountaintop removal.

http://www.ilovemountains.org/: NGO working to save the West Virginia resources.

http://appalshop.org/buffalo/index2.html: This link is to a website for the Buffalo Creek Flood

Disaster that leveled an entire community when a coal waste dam collapsed in West

Virginia in 1972. It provides film clips from the film "Buffalo Creek Flood : An Act of

Man". The videos need RealPlayer to run, but there is a link to download.

http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/Bibs/10IndieFilmsWV.htm: Here is a list of the ten best Indie

Feature Films made in West Virginia.

Doc3.doc: A link to a flow chart of the coal process courtesy of the Appalachian Voice.

http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=6885766: Here is a link to the 20/20 documentary

"Children of the Mountains"

http://wvgazette.com/News/200902130739: This link is to an article in the West Virginia

Gazette that talks about strip mining going on today and the ruling to allow permits for

strip mining company Massey Energy to continue its processes that bury streams and

remove mountain tops.