

Appalachian mountains essay sample



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Appalachia is a 205, 000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains stretching from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It is home to more than 25 million people. Appalachia Mountains are rich in natural resources, containing an abundant number of coal, timber, oil, gas, and water (Daugneaux 1981). These natural resources have historically influenced the economic characteristics of the region. The region's economy has been highly dependent on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry, among which coal mining appears to be the largest financial contributor to the economy (Appalachia's Economy). However, the mining practice used to extract coal in Appalachia called mountaintop removal mining brings serious environmental health threat.

The radical strip-mining process blow the tops off mountains with thousands of pounds of explosives to reach thin seams of coal. They then dump millions of tons of rubble and toxic waste into the streams and valleys below the mining sites (Mining: Destroying Mountains). The waste dumped contaminates drinking water, destroys wild habitat, buries mountain streams, and kills wildlife, bringing devastating damages to the entire communities. There are four distinctive people groups that are involved in the mountaintop removing process, the Appalachians, the coal companies, environmental groups and the government. In this paper I will identify the approach to resource management of these four groups in this mountaintop-removal mining case respectively and compare their approaches and find how different interests affect the way natural resources have been understood, used, and allocated. Analysis

One group is composed of the Appalachians. Appalachians had a strong sense of place that they called home. In the book *Something's Rising*, Silas House and Jason Howard collected narratives that articulated the strong relationship between nature and people. The narrators chosen are both well-known activists and people rarely in the media. While they come from diverse professions—hard-working coal miners, loggers, factory workers, authors, musicians among others—their stories echo each other as each narrator “value[s] and love[s] being in the mountains”, saying that “this is home in the all-inclusive sense, and [they] will not be run off of it” (*Something's Rising* 2009).

Although there may not be any jobs in their community, although most people are touched by deep poverty and tragedy, although they have suffered from mountaintop removal mining, although their mountains are being blown away by coal companies, although water is contaminated with acid run-off, Appalachia and its people have a strong sense of land and heritage, and great love for and pride in the unparalleled natural beauty of their home. When they face not only the physical destruction of their land but also the loss of their culture and health in a society dominated by the consequences of mountaintop removal (*Something's Rising* 2009), many people choose to fight for this land by actively getting involved in the movement against mountaintop removal.

The second people group is composed of coal mining companies. Although coal mining continues to be the largest financial contributor to the economy of Appalachia, poverty remains a daily and depressing reality. This is because the billions of dollars that coal mining generates go to coal

companies, not Appalachians. The profit from coal mining outweighs the negative impact on wildlife and the environment and the harmful health effects for people living in communities near mining operations. Coal companies have profited greatly from the natural resources at the expense of exploiting people and destroying the environment leaving Appalachian people in poverty. The third group is the environmental groups.

EPA has been in the courts and in Congress on behalf of other local and national environmental and community groups to stop this destructive practice and protect the people, communities and waters of Appalachia. EPA's study of the dumping of waste into valleys in 2008 first drew wide attention to the problem that "[mountaintop mining] is strongly related to downstream biological impairment." EPA has tried to assert more authority over mountaintop permits . In Jan. 2011, the EPA decided to veto the dumping of waste from the Spruce No. 1 Mine. But the agency's efforts have so far been rebuffed by the courts as an overreach: Under the weird legal regime that governs mining, it's the Army Corps of Engineers, not the EPA, which has the ultimate say-so over those permits. In 2012, the D. C. district court ruled that EPA lacked authority to veto the permit after the Corps had issued it.

However, in fact EPA's decision is based on evidence from scientific research on serious environmental harm from mining. In May 2013, a coalition of Appalachian and environmental groups petitioned the EPA to set a numeric water quality standard under the Clean Water Act to protect streams from pollution caused by mountaintop removal mining . They claimed that " State politics and industry pressure have so far failed to end

this pollution without such a standard and more and more streams and communities who rely on those waters are left vulnerable. We need EPA to act now." The EPA's authority over the Clean Water Act in respect to Spruce Mine No. 1 was finally affirmed by the Supreme Court in March 2014.

The fourth group is the government. In the film *Rise Up! West Virginia and Mountain Mourning*, environmentalists claim that state government is held responsible for ongoing destructions caused by mountaintop removal mining, since it "has turned its back on the many West Virginians who have borne out of their own property and out of their own pocketbooks the destructive impact of stripping" (Burns 2007), and allows coal mining and its consequences to continue. The film also documents the reason for that government officials, politicians, and even leaders in the United Mine Workers of America promote coal mining as an economic savior for Appalachia.

Few industries other than of coal mining are willing to locate to a mined community, where nature has already been severely damaged. So infrastructure construction and public services become reliant on the tax revenue received from mountaintop removal, which means less mining causes less money for these services. As a result, it is extremely difficult to oppose coal mining politically in Appalachia. Conclusion

Conflicts between these groups arise because they have different uses for resources, and they value environment and economy differently.

Appalachians need jobs, and the coal industry has historically been the main source of them. But, Appalachians also question, what good is a profession

that destroys your home and your body? While environmental groups make the protection of people and the environment of the Appalachian region top priority, the mining companies focus on acting cheaply, not responsibly.

And the policy government buried their heads in the sand because they seek benefits of steady jobs and tax revenue of coal mining instead of seeking to guarantee clean water for Appalachians. Conflicts exist in every sustainable natural resource management Solving conflicts requires the cooperation of all groups involved. Through the cooperation of all groups involved, all groups' interests can be adequately considered and ultimately mountaintop removal mining process may be modified so that environmental and economic goals can be achieved at the same time.

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