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To: Interested Parties

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Subject: **New Poll Findings On Mountaintop Removal in West Virginia**

Date: July 14, 2004

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A recent survey of 500 likely voters in West Virginia, conducted for the *Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment*, reveals solid opposition to the practice mountaintop removal coal mining.¹ **Likely voters, by a nearly 2 to 1 margin, oppose mountaintop removal mining (56 percent compared to just 29 percent).** Fifteen percent of voters are undecided.

Opponents of mountaintop removal also have an even bigger edge in terms of intensity: 39 percent strongly oppose the practice versus just 12 percent who strongly favor it – a 3 to 1 margin. Opposition to mountaintop removal (MTR) is broad and deep, traversing all demographics groups and every region of the state.

There is also significant evidence that as West Virginians learn more about mountaintop removal they are more likely to oppose it. Of the 44 percent of voters who had seen, read or heard something about mountaintop removal recently, six in ten (60 percent) say that what they heard made them less favorable toward the practice, while only 19 percent say it makes them feel more favorable.

The debate over mountaintop removal takes place in an atmosphere where voters are feeling increasingly negative about the quality of West Virginia's environment. **Only 17 percent of voters feel that the environment in West Virginia has gotten better, while more than twice as many (39 percent) feel that conditions have become worse.** Thirty-eight percent of voters say the environment has stayed about the same.

West Virginia voters also do not believe that there needs to be a trade off between environmental protections and a strong economy. **In fact, a 44 percent plurality of voters feels that environmental protections are often good for the economy.** Another quarter feel that that they have little or no impact on the economy (23 percent), and only 21 percent feel that environmental protections harm the economy.

¹ Lake Snell Perry & Associates designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 500 adults age 18 or older in West Virginia who indicated they are registered and likely to vote in the 2004 general election. The survey was conducted June 13th - 15th, 2004. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-4.4%.

West Virginia voters are overwhelmingly concerned about the findings of federal government studies that describe the impacts of mountaintop removal on the state's environment. For example, 79 percent are concerned by the finding that, if new limits are not placed on mountaintop removal, the estimated area that will be stripped by the end of the decade encompasses 1.4 million acres of forests mountains and streams – over 2,200 square miles. Only 18 percent of voters are not concerned by this finding. Additionally, 82 percent of the state's voters are concerned that West Virginia's rivers and streams will become more polluted as a result of mountaintop removal coal mining. Only 16 percent of voters who are not concerned by this finding.

Voters do not want politicians to make mountaintop removal mines easier to permit. When informed that the Bush administration changed the rules of the Clean Water Act and other environmental laws to make it easier for mining companies to conduct mountaintop removal, 60 percent of voters say they oppose making changes to the regulations, and 44 percent strongly oppose the changes. Just 23 percent support the rule changes and 16 percent don't know.

West Virginia's politicians should also take heed that mountaintop removal and the environment are important issues for voters when going to the polls. **Fifty-six percent of voters say that they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who was in favor of weakening environmental regulations on mountaintop removal. Almost two-thirds of all voters (65 percent) say that a candidate's environmental positions are at least a somewhat important factor when deciding whom to vote for.**