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University of Pennsylvania

Institute for Environmental Studies

presents

Mary Hufford

Center for Folklore & Ethnography, University of Pennsylvania

## Out of the Overburden, Onto the Map: Cultural Assessment and the Case of Mountaintop Removal Mining



In recent years, Mountaintop Removal Mining has propelled coal into the national spotlight as a vivid exemplar of the high environmental costs of fossil fuel. To date, hundreds of thousands of square miles of Central Appalachian mountains have been leveled by this method of extraction, and hundreds of miles of stream have been buried under excess spoil (also known as “overburden”). The result is an industrially-designed array of “landform complexes,” comprising “highland complexes,” “wetland complexes,” “sludge impoundments” and “valley fills.” How has such an ecologically diminished landscape emerged within the world’s most biologically diverse temperate-zone hardwood forests, despite the ecological and civic vision articulated in the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act? At issue here is not only the environmental injustice of locating so much of the nation’s coal waste immediately upstream of its most distressed communities, but the eclipsing of the democratic process by the technological worldview.

For communities living nearby, the industrial landforms do not replace lost mountains, valleys, and streams. Facing an increased risk of flooding, property damage from blasting, and exposure to waste-treatment chemicals, coalfield communities are raising serious questions about the cultural and political dimensions of the EIS. What is the impact of the destruction of aesthetic, cultural, and economic resources on individual and community health? What happens to a community’s political standing when the mountains symbolizing its history and identity are torn down? If, as environmental regulators put it, “You manage what you measure,” what resources do we need to monitor in order to sustain community vitality? Dr. Hufford will present tools and techniques for community-based monitoring, developed during her work with coalfield communities over the past ten years.

Corinna McMackin, a master’s candidate in the Environmental Studies Program, and members of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and the Coal River MountainWatch, community organizations from southern West Virginia, will join Dr. Hufford to answer questions and share accounts of the present struggle for cultural recognition and the preservation of community space in the coalfields.

**Date: Thursday, April 24, 2003**

**Time: NOON - 1:30 pm**

**Place: Auditorium at Wistar Institute**

On Penn’s campus: Spruce Street & Penn’s 36<sup>th</sup> Street Walkway

***No Food or Drink Permitted in Auditorium***

**NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED**

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