

# Reconnecting McDOWELL

## Stay connected with McDowell

McDowell County is an American story that deserves a new chapter—one filled with promise, with goodwill, with the type of shared commitment that offers solid reasons to believe in a brighter future. Be a part of this historic partnership and show your support for McDowell's children and the greater community by joining the effort at [www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org](http://www.ReconnectingMcDowell.org).

● Make It Shine  
McDowell

● Science Fair  
at the Armory

● Go Grocery Gears Up  
for Year 3

'WE LIVE IN THE SAME WATERSHED, SO IT JUST MAKES SENSE FOR US TO WORK TOGETHER.'



## Tug Fork River Trail

Reconnecting McDowell hosted a public meeting in December to discuss issues surrounding the Tug Fork River. The meeting, held at the Armory in Welch, drew more than two dozen people, including activists from Mingo County who were instrumental in obtaining official trail designation from West Virginia's Flatwater Commission for the Tug in Mingo County. McDowell County residents at the meeting were enthusiastic about partnering with Mingo County to protect and develop the river.



Reconnecting McDowell's Mark Kemp wonders what sort of fish you might catch with this lure!

The Bloody Mingo Tug Fork Water Trail was a significant milestone for the Friends of the Tug Fork River who

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## Kids Fishing Day: May 14

Several groups are organizing a Kids Fishing Day on May 14, at both Anawalt Lake and Berwind Lake in McDowell County. All children ages 5 to 12 will receive a free rod and reel.

The fishing poles are funded by a WV Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) grant through the Coal Heritage Area Authority. Other partners include Kiwanis clubs in Welch and War, which have held similar events in the past; the McDowell County Convention and Visitors Bureau; the Friends of the Tug Fork River; and Reconnecting McDowell.

Kids attending the two events will go through several educational stations, where they will learn about various water topics from DEP-trained instructors. Once the children complete the stations, they will get their poles and learn how to cast from seasoned fishermen and women. The Kiwanis is coordinating a free lunch for attendees.

Contact Reconnecting McDowell at [mkemp@aftwv.org](mailto:mkemp@aftwv.org) or follow the Friends of the Tug Fork River for more information: [bit.ly/tugriver](https://bit.ly/tugriver).

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## VOLUNTEERS AT THE FALL EVENT COLLECTED MORE THAN 400 LARGE BAGS OF LITTER



From left, Nathan “Peanut” Smith, Carlotta Young and West Virginia House Delegate Ed Evans picked up trash as part of the Make It Shine McDowell event last fall.

## Make It Shine McDowell

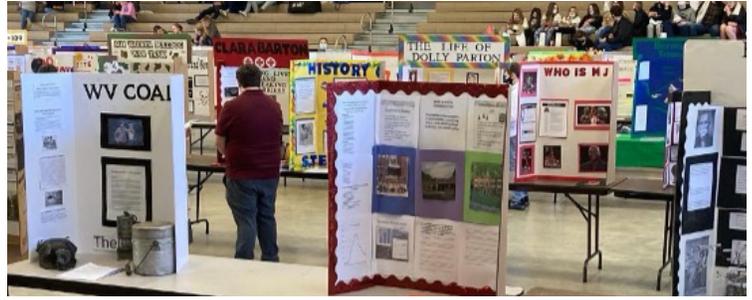
Formed in 2021 to tackle litter, Make It Shine McDowell hosted a countywide cleanup last fall. The coalition, organized by Reconnecting McDowell and the McDowell County Convention and Visitors Bureau, includes members from various churches, Adopt-a-Highway groups, volunteer fire departments, 4-H, the Sheriff’s Office, McDowell County FACES (the family resource network in McDowell), and concerned residents. The October 2021 event netted more than 400 large bags of litter.

The next Make It Shine McDowell cleanup is scheduled for April 30. Prior to the event, participants will be supplied with gloves, grabbers and bags to pick up litter. The County will retrieve the filled bags for disposal in the landfill. This year, the football teams at River View and Mount View high schools will engage in a friendly competition to see who can bag the most trash.

Follow Reconnecting McDowell on social media to keep up on the project. Contact Mark Kemp at [mkemp@aftwv.org](mailto:mkemp@aftwv.org) if you’d like to find or start a cleanup group in your area.

## Science Fair at the Armory

It's not surprising that in an organization founded by educators, Reconnecting McDowell staff members are often asked to help with school-related events and are delighted to participate. Reconnecting McDowell staff member Frances McNulty served as a judge at the county science fair in January at the Welch Armory. The winners will move on to compete at the state-level competition.



Diverse entries were on display at the county science fair held in Welch.

## River Trail: '... the best kept secret in southern West Virginia'

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spent more than five years working to improve the river—including the removal of more than 5,000 tires. Thanks to their efforts, the river has seen tremendous growth in kayaking and fishing. A new tackle and bait shop opened in Williamson, and air boat tours of the river from Matewan are booked solid. Heron, bald eagles and other wildlife are routinely spotted on these excursions.

"The Tug Fork River is the best kept secret in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky," says Pete Runyon,

co-founder of the Friends of the Tug Fork River and the newly elected president of this watershed group. "We are pleased to join forces with the people of McDowell County and Kentucky to improve the Tug and are excited to keep the momentum going. We live in the same watershed, so it just makes sense for us to work together."

A key project that the Friends of the Tug Fork River has been involved with is the Fishing Expo in Williamson, Mingo County. The second expo was

held in February, with more than 1,800 visitors attending and over 90 vendors participating. Inspired by this success, McDowell County will host a similar Sportsmen's Expo on Nov. 5, 2022, in Welch.

Because so many members were at the expo, the Friends of the Tug Fork River held an inaugural meeting at the Williamson Field House. The group elected a board and officers and adopted a mission statement and bylaws. Next steps are to register as a nonprofit in West Virginia and finish the process to obtain 501(c)(3) status. Friends of the Tug Fork River will also apply for the flatwater designation for the river in McDowell County.

Pete Runyon, left, newly elected president of the Friends of the Tug Fork River, and James Russell with the WV Food and Farm Coalition and manager of the Go Growcery project enjoy themselves at the second Fishing Expo in Williamson.



### Find Out More!

The Friends of the Tug Fork River Facebook page now has more than 15,000 members. Follow the group at [bit.ly/tugriver](https://bit.ly/tugriver).

For more information about the Sportsmen's Expo in Welch, call the McDowell County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 304-436-3833 or email [jennifer.justice@mcdowellcvb.com](mailto:jennifer.justice@mcdowellcvb.com) or [michelle.whittaker@mcdowellcvb.com](mailto:michelle.whittaker@mcdowellcvb.com).

West Virginia Public Broadcasting featured the Friends of the Tug Fork in a video about work being done on the river. See it at [bit.ly/wvatrails](https://bit.ly/wvatrails).

MOBILE MARKET EXPANDING TO MERCER COUNTY

# Go Growcery Gears Up for Year 3

The Go Growcery project completed its second year in 2021. The mobile farmers market returned to 16 sites in McDowell County and added three new stops—Mullens, Pineville and Oceana—in Wyoming County. The program began accepting EBT/SNAP, including SNAP Stretch, making it easier for residents to incorporate local produce into family meals. Over the five-month season, the market had more than 9,000 customers.

Looking ahead to the 2022 season, Go Growcery will add a site in eastern Mercer County and help local growers expand their production. Reconnecting McDowell and the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition (WVFFC), our partner running the day-to-day operations, hosted a stakeholders' meeting in January at the Caffrey Center in Welch. The meeting solicited input for improvements to the market and provided information to people who want to sell produce to Go Growcery.

Local farmers and West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition staff listened to James Russell, project coordinator, describe the steps invoked for selling to Go Growcery.

"This year, the mobile market is looking forward to expanding our network of local farmers," said James Russell, foodshed coordinator with the WVFFC. "The first two years of Go Growcery have been great, surpassing our expectations. But this should be our best season yet."

Go Growcery purchases as much as possible from local growers. If you plant a vegetable garden, consider growing extra produce and selling it to Go Growcery! Contact James Russell at [jrussell@wvfoodandfarm.org](mailto:jrussell@wvfoodandfarm.org).

The project is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Learn more and follow the Go Growcery Facebook page to stay up to date on the project: [www.facebook.com/GoGrowceryMarket/](https://www.facebook.com/GoGrowceryMarket/).

Colorful and delicious produce was sold in Welch last summer through the Go Growcery market.

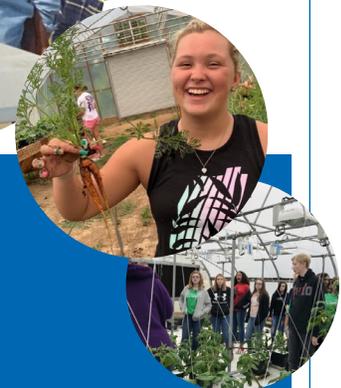
Local farmers and West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition staff listen to James Russell, project coordinator, describe the steps invoked for selling to Go Growcery.



## GO GROWCERY FEATURED IN USDA PUBLICATION

The Go Growcery project and related efforts to build local agriculture in McDowell County were featured in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "At the Table" newsletter. The article looked at several interrelated activities such as the McDowell Youth Producers Association and school-based food education, as well as Reconnecting McDowell's partnership with the West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition to run the mobile farmers market.

The article came about following a presentation Reconnecting McDowell made to the mid-Atlantic regional meeting of projects funded by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's Farm to School program. Read the article at [bit.ly/growceryusda](https://bit.ly/growceryusda).



Meredith Miller, top, a member of the McDowell Youth Producers Association, shows off a carrot grown in the high tunnel at Mount View High School.

PHOTO CREDIT: JENNY TOTTEN

Members of the McDowell Youth Producers Association, above, learn about harvesting produce in one of the County's high tunnels.

# Let's Connect

Follow Reconnecting McDowell on social media to receive the latest updates and news. We share information on webinars, job-training opportunities and upcoming community events. We also highlight our partners and their work in McDowell County and the state.

## Social Media

Follow us on Twitter: [@ReconnectMcD](https://twitter.com/ReconnectMcD)

Follow us on Instagram: [@ReconnectMcD](https://www.instagram.com/ReconnectMcD)

Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/ReconnectMcD](https://facebook.com/ReconnectMcD)

## Want to get involved or learn more?

For more information about Reconnecting McDowell or to find out how you can get involved, contact Debra Elmore ([delmore@aftwv.org](mailto:delmore@aftwv.org) or 304-552-5766).

