

Environment & Recreation

For over a century, the landscape of Southwestern Pennsylvania was dotted with steel mills, coal mines, and industrial development. When many of the mills and mines shut down, they left with them serious environmental hazards and concerns. The clean-up of these sites produces redevelopment opportunities and removes serious hazards to public health and wildlife.

With the region's long history of coal mining, abandoned mine drainage is the area's biggest source of water pollution. Mr. Murtha was among the first members of Congress to recognize back in 1991 that wetland-based passive-treatment systems could remove the acid and other pollutants such as iron oxide that have turned so many of our streams orange. He has worked not only with local watershed groups but also on a national level, where he continually champions the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund and has played a key role in creating the Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative.

Congressman Murtha has also been in the forefront in helping communities build and upgrade sewage-treatment and water systems, as well as mine-drainage treatment systems that have made our streams and drinking water cleaner. Many rural communities lack access to public water systems and have malfunctioning wastewater collection systems that leak sewage into water sources, creating severe health hazards. Over the past thirty-plus years, he has worked with state and local officials and sometimes even private entities to secure hundreds of millions of dollars for these projects.

Congressman Murtha has also championed numerous recreational projects, particularly rail-trails that convert nearly-level abandoned railroad beds into public trails for walking and bicycling. These trails often provide green buffers that filter pollutants from adjacent streams and provide important habitat corridors for wildlife. The most significant of these trails is the Great Allegheny Passage-Cumberland and Pittsburgh Trail, which will soon be part of a 330-mile off-road trail network from the Pittsburgh area to Washington, D.C.

Congressman Murtha has championed our National Parks, both locally and across the country, as jewels that must be preserved for future generations. He has secured funding to preserve national heritage sites from Fort Necessity to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater to Gettysburg National Military Park. He also authored legislation establishing the Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania. Congressman Murtha has played a major role in heritage preservation and tourism efforts throughout Pennsylvania. He created a heritage region that became a model for the National Heritage Area program, which today includes both the Rivers of Steel and Path of Progress in Southwestern Pennsylvania. For his efforts he received the Friends of the National Parks Award as well as awards for his support of historic preservation.

Years ago he began to support funding for alternative energy technology, providing research dollars for military wind energy, fuel cell technology, and a coal-based jet fuel currently being tested in Air Force planes. These initiatives help to advance technology, save taxpayers money and foster a healthy environment to benefit all Americans.

He takes a practical approach to environmental regulation, consistently supporting goals or standards that challenge industry but are attainable without causing major job losses. The result has been clear progress in improving our environment, both nationally and regionally. Congressman Murtha is proud of the role he has played in that progress, and will continue to advocate for steady environmental progress as new technology makes these goals attainable.

Congressman Murtha has been honored several times by both local and statewide organizations for his support of environmental initiatives. He was presented the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, as well as the Conservation is Progress Award, the Riverperson of the Year Award and the John "Bear Man" Kmetz Award from local organizations.