Amphibian Declines and Mountaintop Mines (Obama Approves Mountain-Top Mining for Coal)  
May 18, 2009

DOT Earth

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

Mining: I’ve added Coal Tattoo to my blogroll. It’s an ongoing exploration of coal mining in and around West Virginia by Ken Ward Jr. of the Charleston Gazette. The blog’s name comes from a song by Billy Ed Wheeler, he explains. In a post last week, Mr. Ward noted that the Obama administration had approved 42 of 48 proposed mountaintop mining projects. This appears to reflect how the administration, the United States and many other countries remain stuck between a hard place (reliance on coal for cheap electricity) and a soft rock (bituminous coal). Reflecting that enduring reality, just last month the West Virginia Coal Association noted that Britnee Gibson, a senior at Gilbert High School, successfully led an effort to have the state legislature name coal the official state rock. (A hat tip to the daily news digest of the Society of Environmental Journalists for bringing Coal Tattoo to my attention.)

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About two thirds of 110 species of harlequin frog have vanished in the American tropics in recent decades.
**Extinction:** Elizabeth Kolbert of The New Yorker has explored evidence for a human-driven spasm of extinction getting into high gear as human numbers and appetites spike. She explores the history of research on extinction, which is extraordinarily difficult in part because the demise of a species is a slow-motion, often invisible process. The article is behind a subscription wall online, but she describes the basics in a podcast here. The story focuses on the decadeslong body of research pointing to near-worldwide declines in amphibians, as well as recent die-offs of bats focused in the northeastern United States.

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