

# February 26, 2022, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buffalo Creek MINING DISASTER

## What Happened at Buffalo Creek, West Virginia

One of the country's worst mining-related disasters occurred February 26, 1972, on Buffalo Creek in Logan County. At approximately 8 a.m., a coal waste dam collapsed into the Middle Fork of Buffalo Creek, releasing 132 million gallons of water, coal refuse, and silt down the narrow mountain valley. Within two minutes, the black wave plowed downstream into two other coal waste dams and a burning coal refuse pile. In the next three hours, the rampaging water demolished or partially destroyed the 17 communities downstream. Saunders was hit first, followed by Pardee, Lorado, Craneco, Lundale, Stowe, Crites, Latrobe, Robinette, Amherstdale, Becco, Fanco, Riley, Braeholm, Accoville, Crown, and Kistler.



### BY THE NUMBERS

**132**  
million gallons of water  
crashed into the valley in the  
form of a deadly 25-foot wave

**551**  
houses and mobile homes  
were destroyed

**125**  
people died, including  
entire families

**30**  
businesses were destroyed

**1,100**  
people, at least,  
were injured

**4,000**  
of the residents of Buffalo  
Creek were left homeless

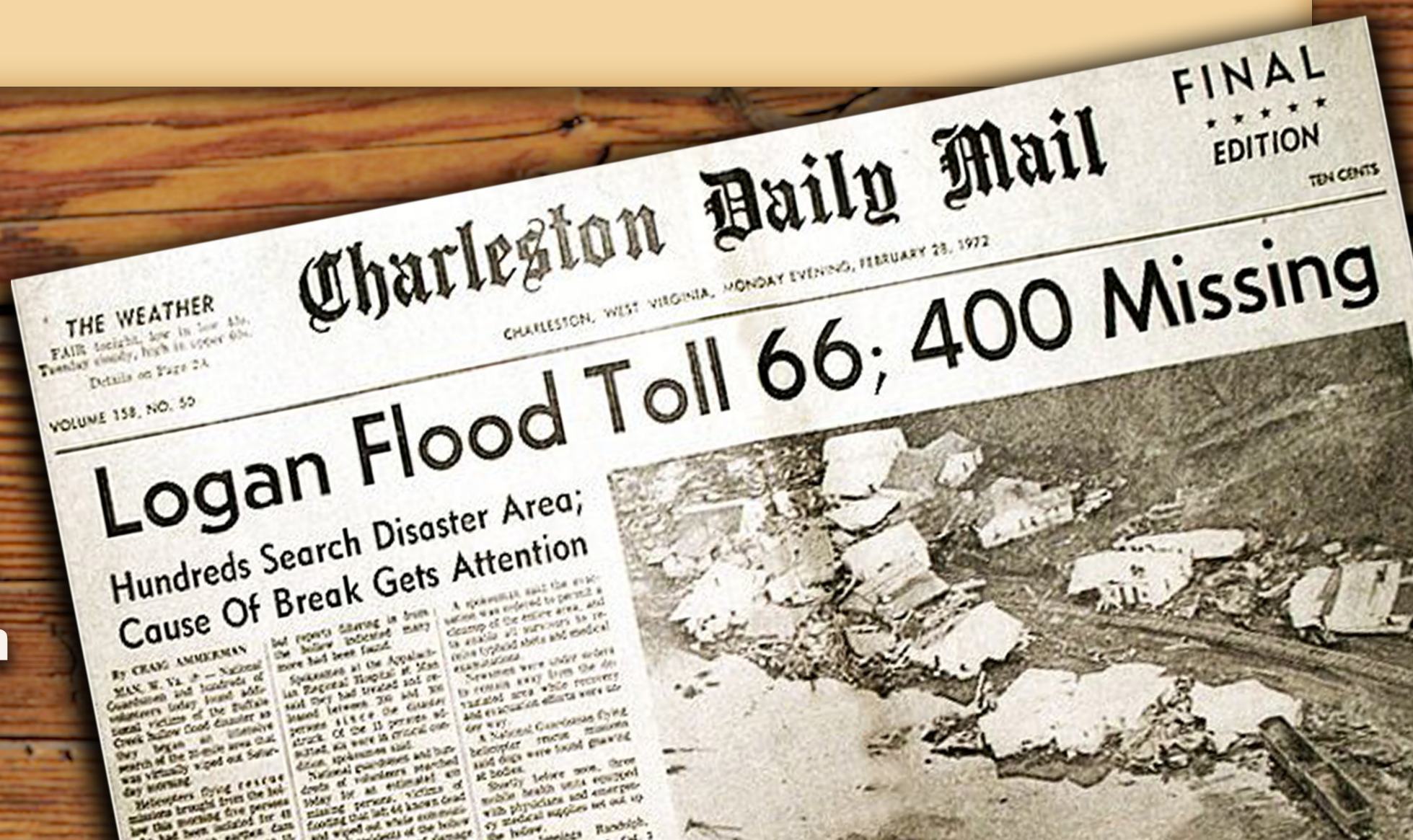
## Aftermath of the Buffalo Creek Disaster

After the flood, state and federal investigations found that the flood was caused by improper construction of the coal waste dams. The Governor's Ad Hoc Commission of Inquiry found that "The Pittston Company, through its officials, has shown flagrant disregard for the safety of residents of Buffalo Creek and other persons who live near coal-refuse impoundments." Pittston officials blamed the flood on the 3.7 inches of rain that fell in the three days before February 26, and called the disaster "an act of God."

Six hundred and forty-five survivors and family members of flood victims filed suit against Pittston. In 1974, the suit was settled for \$13.5 million, an average of \$13,000 for each plaintiff after legal fees. The state of West Virginia also filed suit against Pittston, asking for \$100 million to compensate it for damage to state property and losses to residents. On January 14, 1977, Governor Arch Moore accepted a \$1 million settlement in the suit. In 1988, after years of legal procedures, the state was forced to reimburse \$9.5 million to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood recovery work.

The Buffalo Creek Flood prompted Congress and the West Virginia legislature to pass new laws regulating dam construction and maintenance.

Adams, Nancy Ray "Buffalo Creek Flood." e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia. 02 September 2021. Web. 24 February 2022.



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