

FY2015 AML CONSOLIDATED GRANT
PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

February 11, 2015

The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy, Division of Mined Land Reclamation, Abandoned Mine Land Section, held a public meeting concerning the FY2015 AML Consolidated Grant submittal. The purpose of the meeting was to allow public comment on this grant. The meeting was conducted at the DMME office in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, on February 11, 2015 at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting convened on schedule. The following individuals were present at the meeting.

Becky Sanders, DMLR, Administrative Program Specialist, Recorder,
Jan Zentmeyer, DMLR Grants Administrator, Moderator
Randy Casey, DMLR, Director
Richard Davis, DMLR, AML Projects Manager
Tarah Kesterson, DMME, Public Relations Manager
Gerald D. Collins, Coal Mining Engineering, Wise, VA
James Scott, Coal Mining Engineering, Wise, VA
Matt Hepler, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS), Appalachia, VA
Kendall Bilbrey, SAMS, Big Stone Gap, VA
Marley Green, The Sierra Club, Pound, VA
Jane Branham, SAMS, Norton, VA
Ben Hooper, SAMS, Norton, VA and
Ian Dye, Office of Surface Mining, Big Stone Gap, VA.

Ms. Zentmeyer opened by reading a statement explaining the purpose of the meeting.

Mr. Hepler was the first to speak and asked about the status of the grant application and what projects are priorities for this grant year. Ms. Zentmeyer explained that DMLR is putting the grant application together currently and that it would be submitted in a few weeks since the grant year begins on April 1, 2015. Mr. Davis thoroughly explained the categories of projects that will be conducted under the 2015 AML grant and the specific construction projects that are planned.

Ken Bilbrey was the next to speak and inquired as to the potential for economic development projects being conducted in conjunction with AML projects if additional funding as proposed in the 2015 federal budget were passed. Mr. Casey responded that DMLR is aware of the budget proposal and would certainly be interested in pursuing projects that would allow for reclamation of Priority 3 sites that might also assist in economic development. Mr. Dye added that, at this time, he has received no additional information on the additional AML funding that would assist in such projects.

Ms. Branham was the third speaker and expressed concern about OSM oversight of AML projects and asserted that DMLR has “little to show” for the AML money that has been spent to date. Mr. Davis responded and countered that much has been done and many important AML projects have been completed. He explained that public safety has been the focus of most projects to date and many lie in remote areas of the coalfields, perhaps not easily observed by the general public. The OSM inventory of projects shows that many mine shaft/portals, areas of subsidence, highwalls, landslides, and drainage problems caused by abandoned coal mines have been reclaimed. Also, a number of important projects to bring public water to communities whose water supplies have been adversely affected by mining have been completed and that DMLR is quite proud of the AML accomplishments. Mr. Davis also pointed out that OSM does oversight Virginia’s AML program. Mr. Casey agreed and added that most AML projects are in isolated areas and that DMLR has focused on Priority 1 and 2’s as required.

Mr. Collins, who was the last speaker, also addressed Ms. Branham’s assertion. He noted that reclaimed AML sites take time to develop and mature after reclamation, and people may forget or not notice that abandoned mines lands and the land use may change after reclamation. He cited the location of the Country Cabin in is now a Crooked Road venue and the Wal-Mart shopping center has been a key to economic develop in Norton. Mr. Collins added that there has been no money for Priority 3 projects to date and that he believes many important public safety projects have been addressed with AML funds.

Ms. Branham also asked about tree planting projects. She indicated that DMLR should continue to pursue those projects and monitor success on tree planting projects. Mr. Davis agreed and stated that the Division would continue with reforestation projects.

Mr. Green was the fourth speaker and acknowledged the lack of sufficient federal funding for abandoned mine land reclamation. He asked if DMLR has any upcoming government financed exemptions for incidental coal removal. Mr. Casey responded that the Division would of course consider those as they are submitted and that they have had several small projects in recent years. At this time, however, he is not aware of any such upcoming projects.

Mr. Green also asked if DMLR is aware of the work by the Green Forest work group. Mr. Davis said that DMLR has worked with the ARRI (Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative) core team and supports reforestation in the Coalfields whenever they can. Mr. Davis went on the discuss a number of sites in Lee, Buchanan, and Russell Counties where trees had been planted and American Chestnut seedlings have been planted and estimated an approximate 50% survival rate of those chestnut seedlings.

With no additional attendees or comments, the meeting was closed.
