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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 8, 2017

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Russell County Abandoned Mine Land Project Receives National Award for Environmental Excellence

Hurricane Fork Gob Pile Project Receives Small Project Award from the Office of Surface Mining and Enforcement

Russell County, Va.- A Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) project that helped rid southwest Virginia of the single, worst mine related impact to water quality in the Clinch River was honored with a 2017 Abandoned Mine Land Award from the Office of Surface Mining and Enforcement (OSMRE), a bureau of the U.S. Department of Interior.

DMME used abandoned mine land funds to help with the removal of a 1.5-million-ton gob pile in Hurricane Fork. Gob piles are piles of waste made up of a small amount of coal mixed with shale from old coal mining operations and often seen as waste by operators. Abingdon, Virginia based Gobco, LLC was contracted for the removal. The gob was taken to Dominion Energy's Virginia City Hybrid Energy Center (VCHC) where it was burned for electricity production.

"This project was truly a team effort," said acting Abandoned Mine Lands Coordinator, Lesa Baker. "The opportunity to take something that was once considered waste and make it useful, while eliminating one of the worst environmental hazards in the coalfields is certainly a process abandoned mine land programs across the nation can use as an example for success."

"Decades ago, the gob was discarded because there was no use for it," said David Craymer, Dominion Energy's vice president Power Generation System Operations. "VCHC was built with technologies that allow us to recycle the gob as fuel. We are proud to be a part of this wonderful partnership that is restoring the environment."

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DMME has been working to remove the hazard since 1987 and received approval from the Office of Surface Mining to move ahead with the project in 2014. This project is part of a larger effort to make the entire Clinch watershed healthy again.

The positive results of completing this project are many. Dumps Creek, the nearby stream, was removed from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's impaired stream list, over 10 acres of gob was removed and, most importantly, the threat to human health and safety was erased with reclamation. Over 300 elementary students from Russell County schools added the final reclamation touches on April 27 by planting 1,500 native hardwood seedlings on the reclamation project in an [Arbor Day](#) celebration.

"Hurricane Fork was one of the projects where there was a lot of positive environmental results", said Walt Crickmer Co-Owner and manager of Gobco, LLC. "Working with DMME and Dominion Power to remove the one million tons of waste coal that was polluting the Clinch River makes this project one of the most memorable we have completed. Gobco has now completed over 20 major waste pile removable projects, removing millions of tons of waste coal in Southwest Virginia, and is currently working on two more projects with DMME and Dominion Energy. "

OSMRE will present its Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Awards during the 39th annual conference of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs in Lexington, Kentucky on September 25, 2017.

Since 1982, the Abandoned Mine Land program of DMME has been funding projects to clean up hazards left behind by mining that occurred before reclamation laws were passed. The program is funded through a reclamation fee coal companies pay on each ton of coal produced.

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