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# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

## *Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy*

Washington Building, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1100 Bank Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-3638  
(804) 692-3200 FAX (804) 692-3237  
[www.dmme.virginia.gov](http://www.dmme.virginia.gov)

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Contact: Tarah Kesterson (276) 523-8146

Cell: (276) 356-3405

E-mail: [tarah.kesterson@dmme.virginia.gov](mailto:tarah.kesterson@dmme.virginia.gov)

## **Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy Announces Advisory Group for Economic Development Projects**

**Big Stone Gap, Va.-** The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) has developed an advisory group that will select projects for approval for economic development. Members include Duane Miller, Executive Director of the LENOWISCO Planning District; Jim Baldwin, Executive Director of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District; Jonathan Belcher, Executive Director for the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA); Michelle Jenkins, District Director for Congressman Morgan Griffith's Office; Butch Lambert, Deputy Director for DMME and John Warren, Director for DMME.

The agency will receive \$10 million to develop Abandoned Mine Land (AML) sites. The grant comes from the Power Plus Pilot Program which was part of the federal Omnibus Funding Bill. Projects completed with the funds will not only be designed to boost the economy of southwest Virginia's coalfields but will also improve the environment.

"We have decades of experience in economic and community development on this advisory group," said DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert. "They know southwest Virginia and the opportunities available to improve the economy and we expect they will make the best use of this \$10 million in pilot funding."

An AML inventory is currently available via the DMME [website](#) and lists features for each site. The advisory group will identify projects that meet the requirements of the Power Plus Pilot program and receive approval from the Office of Surface Mining.

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The Abandoned Mine Land program was created after more thorough environmental laws were passed through the Surface Mining and Control Act in 1977. The program is charged with reclaiming sites that were mined before those laws were in place and that could be a hazard to the public and the environment.

DMME prioritizes those projects based on the severity and whether another entity is available to reclaim the site. The \$10 million will allow the agency to reclaim projects that may not have taken precedence before. The reclamation of these projects will have a focus of improving the economy of southwest Virginia with the added benefit of improving the environment.

The advisory group will hold their first meeting in June.

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