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# COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Upper Tennessee River Roundtable Receives \$88,302 for Devil's Fork Loop Trail Improvements and Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands**

**Scott Co., Va.-** A popular tourist site in Scott County, Virginia will see major improvements due to a \$88,302 Pilot Program Grant. The money will be used to make safety and environmental improvements at the Devil's Fork Loop Trail, which is the primary access to the popular Devil's Bathtub. The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) received the \$10 million from the U.S. Department of Treasury to help identify abandoned mine land sites that could be reclaimed to boost the economy of the southwest region of the Commonwealth.

Due to an increase in tourists to the site, the already rough trail has been degraded leading to safety and erosion concerns. Also, historic mine openings at the site present a danger as they can be accessed by people. This grant will improve the trail and close the portals with bat gates to prevent access by humans but still allow a habitat for the bats. Closing the portals will require the trail to be improved so that construction has a minimal environmental impact.

"This site is already an economic treasure for the region," said DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert. "Tourists will be able to safely access a rare site. In addition, this grant will help preserve the historic coal car left on site in hopes of visitors learning about the industry's history in southwest Virginia."

The project will coincide with the construction of a new and larger parking lot made possible by an Appalachian Regional Commission Power grant awarded to the Friends of Southwest Virginia. The Pilot Program grant will be used to construct a connector trail from the new parking lot to the Devil's Fork Loop Trail.

"The Devil's Bathtub and the trail surrounding it are such assets to this region," said Upper Tennessee River Roundtable Executive Director Carol Doss. "We are excited to combine this project with the parking lot improvements and give future visitors a better experience when they come to enjoy the beauty of southwest Virginia."

The Devil's Fork Project was one of 15 proposals submitted to the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME). The agency reviewed proposals for eligibility and then took them before an advisory council made up of people involved in local economic development. The council chose six projects to go to the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) for approval.

The Pilot Program originated in a federal omnibus bill in 2017. DMME will receive another \$10 million this year for more economic development projects on abandoned mine lands. The agency will receive proposals through October 31<sup>st</sup>.

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