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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2018

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Pocahontas to Receive \$1.5 Million for Exhibition Mine Improvements and Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation

Tazewell County, Va.- The goal was to improve the economy of Virginia’s coalfields and a proposal in Pocahontas will do just that. The town was awarded a grant of \$1.5 million from the Abandoned Mine Lands Pilot Program managed by the federal Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement (OSMRE).

The money will be used to improve the Pocahontas Exhibition Mine—the only one of its kind in Virginia. Safety improvements are the top priority and are important to keeping this a tourist stop for years to come. The grant will pay for more roof support and for the paving of the walkway through the mine. Renovations to the museum will also take place and a tram stop will be added so future visitors can ride through the mine tour. In addition, a kitchen will be added in the room adjacent to the museum in hopes of recruiting a restaurant to the site to serve those coming to learn about the history of mining in Virginia.

“This is the largest tourism grant the town of Pocahontas has ever seen and the results from this money should mean a greater economic return to our town,” said Pocahontas Mayor Benjamin Gibson. “This mine is the town’s treasure and unique to Virginia so we need to ensure it becomes a place people across the world put on their lists to visit.”

It is estimated the town will see a 50-percent increase in ticket sales due to the improvements. Pocahontas is also an access location for ATV riders looking to hit the Spearhead or Hatfield-McCoy off road trail systems. Improvements in this site could also increase the number of riders visiting the town.

“This project is a great example of what this Pilot Program money was designated for,” said DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert. “The safety improvements and projected revenue for the

town could make a major difference in the livelihood for the residents and mean future development for an area facing economic struggles.”

“Nothing makes me happier than to see great things happen in Pocahontas,” said Tazewell County Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Maggie Asbury. “Not only are we preserving the rich history of this town but we are also creating a better future for its citizens and visitors.”

Pocahontas’s proposal was one of 15 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 Pocahontas mine was the first in southwest Virginia. Coal mined there served the U.S. Navy through two World Wars. It employed hundreds of citizens and immigrants throughout the time it was an active operation. The mine will close to visitors for the 2018 season for construction. It will reopen in May of 2019 that will coincide with DMME’s annual Safety Days celebration held on-site for Tazewell County schoolchildren.

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 begin receiving proposals in May.

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