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Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

Washington Building, 8th Floor
1100 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219-3638
(804) 692-3200 FAX (804) 692-3237
www.dmme.virginia.gov

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Contact: Tarah Kesterson (276) 523-8146

Cell: (276) 356-3405

E-mail: tarah.kesterson@dmme.virginia.gov

Wise County Industrial Development Authority Receives \$500,000 for a Solar Project Site Preparation and Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands

Wise Co., Va.- The first large scale solar development in Southwest Virginia will be deployed in Wise County thanks to a \$500,000 grant from the Abandoned Mine Land Pilot Program. The grant will fund site preparation for a solar system that will generate over three megawatts in clean energy to be used by the Mineral Gap Data Center. 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.

“This Abandoned Mine Land Pilot program grant will contribute to a large-scale solar project in Wise County,” **said Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA)**. “In addition to a new source of power generation for the Mineral Gap Data Center, this project will result in construction jobs. It will make a positive contribution to Wise County’s economic climate.”

The development of the solar project will result in several economic and environmental benefits. Site preparation and system installation will create several jobs and the use of renewable energy at the Mineral Gap Data Center is expected to increase the center’s customer base. Ridding the site of nearby dangerous portals and clogged stream lands caused by historic coal mining will also improve overall water quality in the region.

“Areas that were once mined are underused. We have thousands of acres that have the potential to have a great impact to the economy of Southwest Virginia,” **said DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert**. “This solar development provides a great example for others to see the potential in historic and reclaimed coal mining lands.”

“Mineral Gap Data Center is honored to be part of southwest Virginia’s renewable-energy future,” **said Kathleen Fowler, spokesperson for Mineral Gap.** “Mineral Gap Data Center is already a leading-edge example of a vital and growing industry, so combining our highly secure facility with highly renewable solar power is a win-win for us, for the region’s economy and for the Commonwealth’s green-energy leadership.”

“Solar is more than just a power source – it’s an engine we’ll continue to use to create jobs, spur economic development, and build a more sustainable future in Southwest Virginia and throughout the Commonwealth,” **said Devin Welch, Chief Strategy Officer of Sun Tribe Solar.** “We’re grateful that we have public sector leaders here in Virginia who understand that by working with the private sector on locally-focused solutions, we can use renewable energy as a positive force for change in all of our communities.”

The Solar Project Site Preparation Project was one of 18 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 ten projects to go to the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) for approval.

The Pilot Program originated in a federal omnibus bill in 2017. DMME has received a total of \$20 million for the projects over the last two years. The agency is expected to receive an additional \$10 million for economic development projects to be selected in 2020.

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