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The Nature Conservancy Receives \$222,000 for Enhancements to Mountain View Trail System and Reclamation of Abandoned Mine Lands

St. Paul, Va. — A trail system, located on lands managed by The Nature Conservancy, that contributed \$18 million in economic impact from 2013-2017 will receive \$222,000 for enhancements. The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) received \$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.

“The trail systems of Virginia’s coal counties, many of them on or near abandoned mine land, have drawn visitors eager to engage in recreation amid our region’s outdoor beauty,” said **Congressman Morgan Griffith (R-VA)**. “Thanks to the award of \$222,000 in AML Pilot Project funding, the Mountain View Trail System in Wise County will undergo improvements in trail quality, signage, and safety. Users of the Mountain View Trail System will appreciate an enhanced experience due to the upgrades supported by the grant, and the communities near the trail will enjoy the economic benefits.”

The Nature Conservancy will use this grant to enhance the existing Spearhead Trails’ Mountain View Trail System—a network of primarily ATV trails that connects St. Paul and Coeburn.

Enhancements will include new signage and scenic overlooks along the trail to provide riders with an enhanced experience and information on wildlife, environmental stewardship and the history of coal mining in the area. The Nature Conservancy will also work with Spearhead Trails and other partners to implement water quality protection measures that can reduce the trail system's impact on the local environment. This will include the installation of Best Management Practices like bridges, erosion control features and armored fords designed to better protect streams. The grant will also pay for the reclamation of several abandoned mine land features that appear along the trail.

“ATV trails are a great example of post-mined land use that create an experience for visitors to our region and tell the history of the land that can now be enjoyed,” said **DMME Deputy Director Butch Lambert**. “The removal of several auger holes left by historic coal mining will also mean the removal of features that could pose a safety risk to trail users.”

The Mountain View Trail System is one of five trails operated by Spearhead Trails. Spearhead Trails was created to maintain ATV trails that have proven to enhance economic development in the coalfield counties of Southwest Virginia.

“This Abandoned Mine Lands Pilot Grant will help The Nature Conservancy and its partners make improvements to the very popular Mountain View Trail System by demonstrating some best practices for environmental stewardship, safety and education of trail users,” said **Brad Kreps, Director of The Nature Conservancy's Clinch Valley Program**. “This effort is part of our larger Cumberland Forest Project, where we are supporting the exciting growth of Southwest Virginia's outdoor recreation industry while at the same time raising the bar on our region's collective protection of wildlife habitats, water quality and biodiversity.”

Enhancing the Mountain View Trail System was one of 19 proposals submitted to the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) for the 2018 grant. 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 received another \$10 million in 2019. Proposals are currently under review by the advisory council.

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