



DIVISIONS  
ENERGY  
GAS AND OIL  
GEOLOGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES  
MINED LAND RECLAMATION  
MINERAL MINING  
MINES  
ADMINISTRATION

# 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**

May 20 , 2021

Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

Contact: Tarah Kesterson

276-356-3405

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

## **Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy Announces New Innovative Reclamation Program**

**Big Stone Gap, Va.** – There is a new program at the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) designed specifically to assist economic development projects on previously mined land. The Innovative Reclamation Program was created in January 2021 and is already seeing success.

“This work is not new to DMME but we definitely have put a stronger focus on innovative reclamation,” **said DMME Director John Warren.** “Our agency has a successful history of helping to reclaim coal mines and other mined land for a greater purpose and this program will play a key role as our agency works to reinvent the economy of southwest Virginia.”

The Innovative Reclamation Program is based at DMME Big Stone Gap. The staff includes experts in GIS data that hold decades of combined work in providing information to potential developers and knowledge of possibilities for mined land. The team will work with current reclamation plans on permitted sites and also assist grant recipients in the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Program.

“My team and I are excited to focus on ways we can contribute to new economic development in southwest Virginia,” **said Innovative Reclamation Manager Daniel Kestner.** “We are happy to open the conversation between potential developers, landowners and current coal mining companies about what these sites can become.”

The agency is already seeing success through the program, including a solar development at a former coal mining site in Buchanan County. DMME opened the conversation years ago with a coal company about repurposing the site into a utility-scale solar development. Savion Solar has committed to construct a system that generates 75 MW of renewable energy.

“We are proud of the work we are doing in conjunction with DMME in Virginia. These development efforts are important from the perspective of economic activity and diversity to the host communities and present opportunities for new jobs,” **said Erich Miarka, Senior Development Manager for Savion.** “The key to project success is good partnership with state and local government. We have been fortunate to enjoy strong support from staff and elected officials who want to protect the people and land of Appalachia. We wish to thank the Innovative Reclamation Program and its team for generating the means to put this important terrain back into productive use.”

DMME is a long-time partner with The Nature Conservancy, which recently announced its first set of renewable energy development projects on former mined lands in Southwest Virginia. The Innovative Reclamation team gathered data for the initial solar siting analysis on previously mined land located within TNC’s Cumberland Forest Property.

“We have a long and positive working relationship with DMME to find innovative reclamation approaches on former mining sites,” **said Clinch Valley Program Director of The Nature Conservancy Brad Kreps.** “As we’ve begun to explore solar development potential on some of the sites that are located on properties we manage, DMME’s technical assistance and outreach to companies and communities has been very helpful.”

While the Innovative Reclamation program prioritizes development on former coal mined land, they also house data for those developers looking at any type of former mined site across the Commonwealth. Those within the program also collaborate with the Virginia Department of Environment Quality’s (DEQ) Brownfields Program.

“DEQ is thrilled to continue to expand our partnership with DMME and our joint efforts to promote the innovative reuse of previously mined lands and other brownfields across the Commonwealth,” **said DEQ Brownfields Program Coordinator Vincent Maiden.** “We are committed to continuing to provide expertise and technical assistance to promote similar projects for years to come.”

In line with the agency’s work toward meeting the goals of the Virginia Clean Economy Act, renewable energy projects are encouraged on the sites. The team is also equipped to provide data for energy, industrial, agricultural and community development projects.

Potential developers needing information should contact Daniel Kestner 276-639-5322 or [Daniel.Kestner@dmme.virginia.gov](mailto:Daniel.Kestner@dmme.virginia.gov)

###