

Fact Sheet
August 2013

The Case for Reinvesting in the North Fork Powell River Watershed

Introduction

This watershed project has improved water quality for residents by reducing pollution entering local streams from abandoned mine lands. The project also contributed to the economic growth of the area with expanded opportunities for fishing on the North Fork of the Powell River and its tributaries.

Funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, this project was part of the Obama Administration's plans to modernize the nation's infrastructure, jumpstart the economy, and create jobs.

NRCS provided \$259,672 in Recovery Act funds and the sponsors provided \$149,054 for a total of \$408,726 to treat five Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) sites. The treatment of these sites has been so successful that the state is contributing another one million dollars to treat six additional sites.

Project Description

- Location: Lee County, Virginia, 9th Congressional District
- Size: Covers 57,620 acres
- Start Date: July 2009

NRCS identified 39 sites where AMD had contaminated fishing streams and impaired drinking water. Extremely low pH made the water so acidic that it corroded pipes, culverts and other infrastructure, creating an economic hardship for communities and homeowners.

ARRA funds were used to treat five acid mine drainage and critically eroding mined land sites. Project measures included successive alkalinity producing systems, open limestone channels, settling ponds, constructed wetlands, and erosion and sediment control practices.

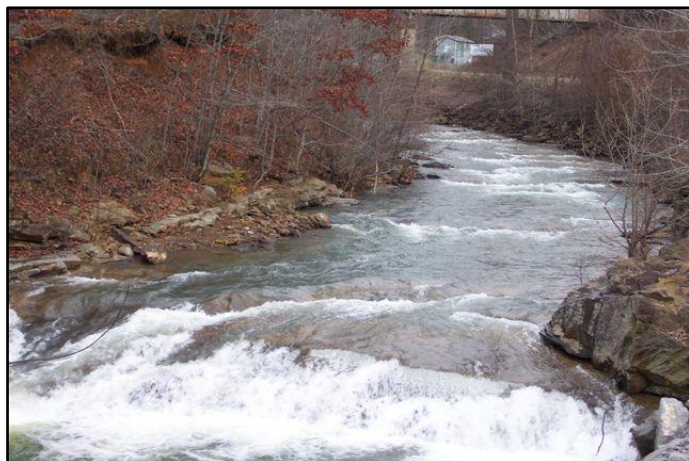
Partners

- Lee County Board of Supervisors, Virginia
- Daniel Boone Soil and Water Conservation District
- Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

Benefits

The overall benefits of the project were improved water quality and increased recreational and economic growth opportunities. Completing the five original sites with ARRA funds and six new sites with state funds will result in reduced acidity of surface and groundwater supplies, decreased costs for infrastructure repairs, restored aquatic habitat on 2.5 miles of stream, and increased employment associated with fishing and tourism services.

North Fork of the Powell
River Watershed



Twenty nine species of mussels and nineteen species of rare fish are found in the North Fork Powell River drainage.

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The project will keep 252 tons of sediment out of streams annually.



Acid mine drainage will be treated on five sites.



Residents will no longer have to haul drinking water.

Economic Opportunities

In addition to creating and saving local jobs, the project also generated revenue for small, privately owned businesses through increased sales of construction supplies, equipment parts and services. Managers and workers gained valuable experience for bidding on future acid mine drainage projects in the region's coal counties.

In addition, the Daniel Boone SWCD hired a full time employee to coordinate the land rights, permits and construction easements. His position continues as he supports the work to repair additional sites.

Tim Miles hired by the SWCD plants trees on an outdoor classroom built on reclaimed mined land.



Statewide Perspective

The watershed is located in the northeastern part of Lee County and is completely mountainous. Seventy years of unrestricted coal mining had severely impacted water quality. Some residents had to haul potable water to their households. There is little agricultural land in this part of the county.

Since most of the mines were worked prior to federal mine land reclamation laws, they were simply abandoned once the coal was extracted. Eroding banks of mineral subsoil and waste piles were pushed over steep hillsides and left bare.

Tim Miles shows dignitaries around project site and explains successive alkalinity producing system at dedication ceremony.



Soil and contaminants washed into nearby streams and metals attached to these sediments became toxic to fish, invertebrates and plant life.

This ARRA project on the North Fork Powell River Watershed is helping create a better place to live for people, fish and endangered species.

For More Information

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Or, visit our website at:
www.va.nrcs.gov