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Second grant goes for mine reclamation

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— Muchakinock Creek, designated an impaired watershed by the Iowa DNR and called a priority body of water in the county by the Mahaska Soil and Water Conservation District, now has an additional \$500,000 to restore the watershed. The Watershed Improvement Review Board just announced the award of a \$500,000, three-year grant, which will be used essentially to reclaim three abandoned coal mine sites, Muchakinock Creek watershed project coordinator Matt Lechtenberg said Wednesday afternoon. WIRB awarded the Muchakinock Creek watershed project a \$500,000, three-year grant in 2005. “We had all this money for terraces and grade stabilization structures and then another problem that was found while the project was started was the abandoned coal mines,” Lechtenberg said. “And so the previous coordinator submitted for a WIRB grant and ... right now we’re in the third year of that.”

Lechtenberg said one abandoned coal mine site south of Oskaloosa has been reclaimed and now the focus is on reclaiming one abandoned site near Beacon and two abandoned sites close together between Beacon and Eddyville. He said they collaborated with the Mines and Minerals Bureau in the Department of Agriculture and with Pathfinders Resource Conservation and Development to receive money to help reclaim the abandoned mines.

“We try to do one a year,” he said. “One site a year. These sites ... they contribute a large amount of sediment to the Muchakinock Creek.”

Lechtenberg estimated the large spoil piles from just one abandoned coal mine could deposit as much as 35 tons per acre per year into the creek. Reclaiming the land involves a variety of activities, including the placement of lime to offset high acid levels.

“So they go in and they reshape these areas and put a permanent seeding on them and also do some structures like terraces or ponds to help control that erosion,” he said. “It also provides the landowners with something that’s usable.”

After a few years, the restored land can be used for limited grazing and offers habitat for wildlife.

The cost to reclaim the three abandoned sites, which should be completed this year, is \$2.45 million, Lechtenberg said.

Besides the grant money from WIRB, Pathfinders RC&D is giving \$300,000 and the Mines and Minerals Bureau is covering the rest.

While the price to reclaim abandoned mines is pricey, Lechtenberg pointed out other Muchakinock Creek watershed issues are being addressed.

“This is part of a comprehensive watershed project that we’ve been doing through other money that doesn’t involve the mines,” Lechtenberg said. “This is mostly on crop land. We’ve been putting in terraces and grade stabilization structures.”

Muchakinock Creek starts southeast of Pella and meets the Des Moines River near Eddyville. According to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Web site, Muchakinock Creek runs by the communities of Pella, Leighton, Evans, Beacon, Oskaloosa and Eddyville. The Muchakinock Creek watershed covers 49,000 acres, 66 percent of it is crop land, and abandoned coal mines cover 1,700 acres.

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