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## STUDENTS CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY BY PLANTING TREES ON MINED LAND

**Flint Gap, VA** – Approximately 60 students from Dickenson County celebrated Arbor Day on April 4, 2008, by planting trees on mined land at a pilot carbon sequestration project area in Russell County, Virginia. The students planted approximately 1,500 trees, including oaks, ash, maples, walnut, and American chestnuts.

State and federal officials introduced students to the latest research on establishing valuable and productive forests on mined lands. Students from the Dickenson County Career Center and Ervinton High School participated in educational sessions and tree planting.

“We had approximately 12 groups of students planting trees in the morning and after lunch,” stated Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) Division of Mined Land Reclamation Director Butch Lambert. “This is our fourth Arbor Day celebration, and we have enjoyed great support from the industry and schools from throughout the area. The students did great work planting the trees in accordance with the research from Virginia Tech.”

The Arbor Day celebration is an event of the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI), a partnership to promote reforestation on permitted coal mines and abandoned coal mine sites. Sponsors of the event include: the DMME, the federal Office of Surface Mining, the Virginia Department of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, the American Chestnut Foundation, Upper Tennessee River Round Table and Take Pride in America. Vaughan –Bassett, a Virginia furniture manufacturer based in Galax, provided the hardwood seedlings. The American Chestnut Foundation provided the chestnut seedlings.

“The support and enthusiasm for Arbor Day is tremendous,” Lambert added. “In addition to being a fun experience for the students, Arbor Day activities also emphasize Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs). The Arbor Day sponsors gave presentations that directly relate to secondary school SOLs for biology and earth science. We hope that the Arbor Day activities will encourage some of the students to consider a career in natural resources management.”

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Brad Kreps of The Nature Conservancy noted that the Flint Gap site is an excellent area to emphasize the importance of reforestation. “At Flint Gap, The Nature Conservancy and its partners are demonstrating how to use the latest scientific advances to sequester carbon dioxide by reforesting mined land. The Conservancy is concerned globally with climate change, and our effort at Flint Gap is a step in the right direction to combat global climate change. In addition to sequestering carbon, reforesting mined land in the Clinch River watershed will enhance wildlife habitat and improve water quality for the tremendous aquatic biodiversity in the river.”

This year’s Arbor Day celebration also highlighted the American chestnut.

“Prior to 1900, this species was a dominant tree over much of the forest in eastern North America,” said Marshal Case, president of the American Chestnut Foundation (ACF). “The chestnut quickly succumbed to a blight accidentally introduced from Asia. By the 1950s, all that remained were the dead, ghostly trunks of the species. However, the future for this species holds a promise of return to dominance,” said Case. “ACF hopes to use surface mined land as sites for introducing blight-resistant American chestnuts. Arbor Day events are excellent opportunities to share the promise of restoring the American chestnut.”

During the tree-planting event, DMME recognized Red River Coal Company Inc., and GOBCO, LLC for their achievements with reforestation. Red River won the ARRI award for excellence in reforestation of an active mine. The company applied the forestry reclamation approach to establish a diverse young forest on an active surface mine in Wise County, Va. GOBCO won the ARRI award for abandoned mine land (AML) reclamation through its implementation of the forestry reclamation approach on an AML project in Dickenson County, Va. DMME also recognized Jimmy Adkins of Paramount Coal Company Virginia LLC for individual career excellence in mined land reclamation.

“Over 80 percent of Virginia’s coal mine land is reclaimed to a post-mining land use of forest,” said Lambert. “To ensure that current and future generations realize the environmental and economic benefits of reforestation, it is important that agencies promote the latest scientific advances in reforestation to the industry and those who will follow us.”

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