



Friday, March 20, 2009

Group promotes mined land reforestation

By: BONNIE SHORTT - Staff Writer

WISE - A three-year-old organization is promoting methods to increase the use of trees in reclaiming mined land here and in several other states.

Members of the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative attended the annual Powell River Project Symposium Wednesday at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, in order to educate the public and coal companies about ARRI's goals.

ARRI works to restore forests on mined land in Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

Mixed success

The nature of reclaimed strip mine soil makes a difference in the survival rate of trees, said Vic Davis, of the U.S. Office of Surface Mining.

Studies done on tested land showed that after eight years, trees planted on reclaimed sites survive at the following rates:

- 71 percent survive in non-compacted soil;

- 56 percent survive in rough grade soil;

- 22 percent survive in compacted soil; and

- 43 percent survive in dozer-ripped soil.

The study was conducted in Kentucky, said Chris Stanley, of the Virginia Division of Mined Land Reclamation.

Virginia strip mines are generally reclaimed with rough grade soil, Stanley explained. Reclamation with non-compacted soil has not yet been approved for Virginia, he said. Stanley noted that tests have also demonstrated that the size of a tree is influenced by the compaction of the soil.

Reforestation research at Virginia Tech's Powell River Project since 1980 shows that restored forests can be equally or more productive than the native forests removed by mining, according to a publication by Tech forestry department official James Burger and Carl Zipper, with Tech's Crop and Soil Environmental Department. Burger noted that reforestation is important because of the products and services the trees can offer.

initiative's objectives

The regional reforestation initiative has three goals, according to Stanley:

- Plant more high-value hardwood trees on reclaimed mined lands;

- Increase the survival and growth rates of planted trees; and

- Expedite the establishment of forest habitat through natural succession.

The initiative's specific recommendations to meet those goals include:

- Create a suitable rooting medium for good tree growth;

- Loosely grade the topsoil to create a non-compacted growth medium;

- Use ground covers that are compatible with growing trees, such as legumes;

- Plant two types of trees, early succession and commercially valuable trees; and

- Use proper tree planting techniques.

Stanley noted that ARRI started in 2003. But in 1995 DMLR created Memo 396, which had four goals, three of which matched ARRI's current goals. Memo 396 did not address proper tree planting techniques.

Virginia is ahead of the other Appalachian states because we have been doing this since 1996, he said.

New forest

By: MELANIE LANE PHOTO

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Several local agencies and volunteers met Tuesday to plant 800 trees on a reclaimed gob pile in Crane's Nest as part of the effort to restore high-quality forests on former mine sites. Left to right, Patrick Angel with the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, Guest River Restoration

Project OSM/VISTA volunteer Claire Donley and Virginia Division of Mined Land Reclamation inspector Richard Davis scout sites for planting.



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